

MORTON EDWIN HART

Thou fool !
To seek companions in a crowd !
Into thy room,
 and there upon thy knees,
Before thy bookshelves,
 humbly thank thy God,
That thou hast friends like these !

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THE COMPLETE WORKS
OF
OSCAR WILDE



THE DUCHESS OF PADUA
AN IDEAL HUSBAND

Volume 1

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New York

Edition De Luxe

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375

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THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY

SIMONE GESSO, Duke of Padua

BEATRICE, his Wife

ANDREAS POLLAJUOLO, Cardinal of Padua

MAFFIO PETRUCCI,

JEPPO VITELLOZZO,

TADDEO BARDI,

Gentlemen of the Duke's
Household

GUIDO FERRANTI, a Young Man

ASCANIO CRISTOFANO, his Friend

COUNT MORANZONE, an Old Man

BERNARDO CAVALCANTI, Lord Justice of Padua

HUGO, the Headsman

LUCY, a Tire woman

Servants, Citizens, Soldiers, Monks, Falconers with their
hawks and dogs, etc.

PLACE: *Padua*

TIME: *The latter half of Sixteenth Century*

THE SCENES OF THE PLAY

- Act I. *The Market Place of Padua* (25 minutes).
- Act II. *Room in the Duke's Palace* (36 minutes).
- Act III. *Corridor in the Duke's Palace* (29 minutes).
- Act IV. *The Hall of Justice* (31 minutes).
- Act V. *The Dungeon* (25 minutes).

Style of Architecture : Italian, Gothic, and Romanesque.

ACT I

SCENE

The Market Place of Padua at noon ; in the background is the great Cathedral of Padua ; the architecture is Romanesque, and wrought in black and white marbles ; a flight of marble steps leads up to the Cathedral door ; at the foot of the steps are two large stone lions ; the houses on each side of the stage have coloured awnings from their windows, and are flanked by stone arcades ; on the right of the stage is the public fountain, with a triton in green bronze blowing from a conch ; around the fountain is a stone seat ; the bell of the Cathedral is ringing, and the citizens, men, women and children, are passing into the Cathedral.

(Enter GUIDO FERRANTI and ASCANIO ORISTOFANO.)

ASCANIO

Now by my life, Guido, I will go no farther ; for if I walk another step I will have no life left to swear by ; this wild-goose errand of yours !

(Sits down on the steps of the fountain.)

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT I. GUIDO

I think it must be here. (*Goes up to passer-by and doffs his cap.*) Pray, sir, is this the market place, and that the church of Santa Croce ? (*Citizen bows.*) I thank you, sir.

ASCANIO

Well ?

GUIDO

Ay ! it is here.

ASCANIO

I would it were somewhere else, for I see no wine-shop.

GUIDO

(*Taking a letter from his pocket and reading it.*) 'The hour noon ; the city, Padua ; the place, the market ; and the day, Saint Philip's Day.'

ASCANIO

And what of the man, how shall we know him ?

GUIDO (*reading still*)

'I will wear a violet cloak with a silver

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

falcon broidered on the shoulder.' A brave ACT I.
attire, Ascanio.

ASCANIO

I'd sooner have my leathern jerkin. And
you think he will tell you of your father ?

GUIDO

Why, yes ! It is a month ago now, you re-
member ; I was in the vineyard, just at the
corner nearest the road, where the goats used
to get in, a man rode up and asked me was my
name Guido, and gave me this letter, signed
' Your Father's Friend,' bidding me be here
to-day if I would know the secret of my birth,
and telling me how to recognise the writer !
I had always thought old Pedro was my uncle,
but he told me that he was not, but that I had
been left a child in his charge by some one he
had never since seen.

ASCANIO

And you don't know who your father is ?

GUIDO

No.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT I. ASCANIO

No recollection of him even?

GUIDO

None, Ascanio, none.

ASCANIO (*laughing*)

Then he could never have boxed your ears
so often as my father did mine.

GUIDO (*smiling*)

I am sure you never deserved it.

ASCANIO

Never; and that made it worse. I hadn't
the consciousness of guilt to buoy me up.
What hour did you say he fixed?

GUIDO

Noon. (*Clock in the Cathedral strikes.*)

ASCANIO

It is that now, and your man has not come.
I don't believe in him, Guido. I think it is
some wench who has set her eye at you; and,
as I have followed you from Perugia to Padua,
I swear you shall follow me to the nearest

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

tavern. (*Rises.*) By the great gods of eating, ACT I. Guido, I am as hungry as a widow is for a husband, as tired as a young maid is of good advice, and as dry as a monk's sermon. Come, Guido, you stand there looking at nothing, like the fool who tried to look into his own mind ; your man will not come.

GUIDO

Well, I suppose you are right. Ah ! (*Just as he is leaving the stage with ASCANIO, enter LORD MORANZONE in a violet cloak, with a silver falcon brodered on the shoulder ; he passes across to the Cathedral, and just as he is going in GUIDO runs up and touches him.*)

MORANZONE

Guido Ferranti, thou hast come in time.

GUIDO

What ! Does my father live ?

MORANZONE

Ay ! lives in you.

Thou art the same in mould and lineament,
Carriage and form, and outward semblances ;
I trust thou art in noble mind the same.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT I. GUIDO

Oh, tell me of my father ; I have lived
But for this moment.

MORANZONE

We must be alone.

GUIDO

This is my dearest friend, who out of love
Has followed me to Padua ; as two brothers,
There is no secret which we do not share.

MORANZONE

There is one secret which ye shall not share ;
Bid him go hence.

GUIDO (*to ASCANIO*)

Come back within the hour.
He does not know that nothing in this world
Can dim the perfect mirror of our love.
Within the hour come.

ASCANIO

Speak not to him,
There is a dreadful terror in his look.

GUIDO (*laughing*)

Nay, nay, I doubt not that he has come to tell,

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

That I am some great Lord of Italy, ACT I.
And we will have long days of joy together.
Within the hour, dear Ascanio.

(Exit ASCANIO.)

Now tell me of my father? *(Sits down on a stone seat.)* Stood he tall?

I warrant he looked tall upon his horse.
His hair was black? or perhaps a reddish gold,

Like a red fire of gold? Was his voice low?
The very bravest men have voices sometimes

Full of low music; or a clarion was it
That brake with terror all his enemies?
Did he ride singly? or with many squires
And valiant gentlemen to serve his state?
For oftentimes methinks I feel my veins
Beat with the blood of kings. Was he a
king?

MORANZONE

Ay, of all men he was the kingliest.

GUIDO (*proudly*)

Then when you saw my noble father last
He was set high above the heads of men?

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT I. MORANZONE

Ay, he was high above the heads of men,
(Walks over to GUIDO and puts his hand upon
his shoulder.)

On a red scaffold, with a butcher's block
Set for his neck.

GUIDO (*leaping up*)

What dreadful man art thou,
That like a raven, or the midnight owl,
Com'st with this awful message from the
grave?

MORANZONE

I am known here as the Count Moranzone,
Lord of a barren castle on a rock,
With a few acres of unkindly land
And six not thrifty servants. But I was one
Of Parma's noblest princes ; more than that, that,
I was your father's friend.

GUIDO (*clasping his hand*)

Tell me of him.

MORANZONE

You are the son of that great Duke Lorenzo,
[Whose banner waved on many a well-fought
field.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

Against the Saracen, and heretic Turk,]
He was the Prince of Parma, and the Duke
Of all the fair domains of Lombardy
Down to the gates of Florence ; nay, Florence
even
Was wont to pay him tribute—

ACT I.

GUIDO

Come to his death.

MORANZONE

You will hear that soon enough. Being at
war—

O noble lion of war, that would not suffer
Injustice done in Italy !—he led
The very flower of chivalry against
That foul adulterous Lord of Rimini,
Giovanni Malatesta—whom God curse !
And was by him in treacherous ambush
taken,
[And was by him in common fetters bound]
And like a villain, or a low-born knave,
Was by him on the public scaffold murdered.

GUIDO (*clutching his dagger*)

Doth Malatesta live ?

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT I MORANZONE

No, he is dead.

GUIDO

Did you say dead? O too swift runner,
Death,
Couldst thou not wait for me a little space,
And I had done thy bidding!

MORANZONE (*clutching his wrist*)

Thou canst do it!

The man who sold thy father is alive.

GUIDO

Sold! was my father sold?

MORANZONE

Ay! trafficked for,
Like a vile chattel, for a price betrayed,
Bartered and bargained for in privy market
By one whom he had held his perfect friend,
One he had trusted, one he had well loved,
One whom by ties of kindness he had bound—
[Oh! to sow seeds of kindness in this world
Is but to reap ingratitude!]

GUIDO

And he lives

Who sold my father.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

MORANZONE

ACT I.

I will bring you to him.

GUIDO

So, Judas, thou art living ! well, I will make
This world thy field of blood, so buy it
straightway,
For thou must hang there.

MORANZONE

Judas said you, boy ?

Yes, Judas in his treachery, but still
He was more wise than Judas was, and held
Those thirty silver pieces not enough.

GUIDO

What got he for my father's blood ?

MORANZONE

What got he ?

Why cities, fiefs, and principalities,
Vineyards, and lands.

GUIDO

Of which he shall but keep
Six feet of ground to rot in. Where is he,
This damned villain, this foul devil ? where ?
Show me the man, and come he cased in steel,

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT I. In complete panoply and pride of war,
Ay, guarded by a thousand men-at-arms,
Yet I shall reach him through their spears,
and feel
The last black drop of blood from his black
heart
Crawl down my blade. Show me the man, I
say,
And I will kill him.

MORANZONE (*coldly*)

Fool, what revenge is there ?
Death is the common heritage of all,
And death comes best when it comes suddenly.

(*Goes up close to GUIDO.*)

Thy father was betrayed, there is your cue ;
For you shall sell the seller in his turn.
I will make you of his household, you will sit
At the same board with him, eat of his
bread—

GUIDO

O bitter bread !

MORANZONE

Your palate is too nice,
Revenge will make it sweet. Thou shalt o'
nights

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

Pledge him in wine, drink from his cup, and be ACT I.
His intimate, so he will fawn on thee,
Love thee, and trust thee in all secret
things.

If he bids thee be merry thou must laugh,
And if it be his humour to be sad
Thou shalt don sables. Then when the time
is ripe—— (GUIDO *clutches his sword.*)
Nay, nay, I trust thee not; your hot young
blood,
Undisciplined nature, and too violent rage
Will never tarry for this great revenge,
But wreck itself on passion.

GUIDO

Thou knowest me not.
Tell me the man, and I in everything
Will do thy bidding.

MORANZONE

Well, when the time is ripe,
The victim trusting and the occasion sure,
I will by sudden secret messenger
Send thee a sign.

GULDO

How shall I kill him, tell me?

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT I. MORANZONE

That night thou shalt creep into his private
chamber;

[That night remember.]

GUIDO

[I shall not forget.]

MORANZONE

[I do not know if guilty people sleep,]
But if he sleeps see that you wake him first,
And hold your hand upon his throat, ay! that
way,
Then having told him of what blood you are,
Sprung from what father, and for what
revenge,
Bid him to pray for mercy ; when he prays,
Bid him to set a price upon his life,
And when he strips himself of all his gold
Tell him thou needest not gold, and hast not
mercy,
And do thy business straight away. Swear
to me
You will not kill him till I bid you do it,
Or else I go to mine own house, and leave
You ignorant, and your father unavenged.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

GUIDO

ACT I.

Now by my father's sword——

MORANZONE

The common hangman
Brake that in sunder in the public square.

GUIDO

Then by my father's grave——

MORANZONE

What grave? what grave?
Your noble father lieth in no grave,
I saw his dust strewn on the air, his ashes
Whirled through the windy streets like common straws

To plague a beggar's eyesight, and his head,
That gentle head, set on the prison spike,
[Girt with the mockery of a paper crown]
For the vile rabble in their insolence
To shoot their tongues at.

GUIDO

Was it so indeed?

Then by my father's spotless memory,
And by the shameful manner of his death,
And by the base betrayal by his friend,

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT I. For these at least remain, by these I swear
I will not lay my hand upon his life
Until you bid me, then—God help his soul,
For he shall die as never dog died yet.
And now, the sign, what is it?

MORANZONE

This dagger, boy;

It was your father's.

GUIDO

O, let me look at it!

I do remember now my reputed uncle,
That good old husbandman I left at home,
Told me a cloak wrapped round me when a babe
Bare too much yellow leopards wrought in gold;
I like them best in steel, as they are here,
They suit my purpose better. Tell me, sir,
Have you no message from my father to me?

MORANZONE

Poor boy, you never saw that noble father,
For when by his false friend he had been sold,
Alone of all his gentlemen I escaped
To bear the news to Parma to the Duchess.

GUIDO

[Speak to me of my mother.]

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

MORANZONE

ACT I.

When your mother,
[Than whom no saint in heaven was more pure,]
Heard my black news, she fell into a swoon,
And, being with untimely travail seized—
[Indeed, she was but seven months a bride—]
Bare thee into the world before thy time,
And then her soul went heavenward, to wait
Thy father, at the gates of Paradise.

GUIDO

A mother dead, a father sold and bartered !
I seem to stand on some beleaguered wall,
And messenger comes after messenger
With a new tale of terror ; give me breath,
Mine ears are tired.

MORANZONE

When thy mother died,
Fearing our enemies, I gave it out
Thou wert dead also, and then privily
Conveyed thee to an ancient servitor,
Who by Perugia lived ; the rest thou knowest.

GUIDO

Saw you my father afterwards ?

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT I. MORANZONE

Ay! once;
In mean attire, like a vineyard dresser,
I stole to Rimini.

GUIDO (*taking his hand*)

O generous heart!

MORANZONE

One can buy everything in Rimini,
And so I bought the gaolers! when your father
Heard that a man child had been born to him,
His noble face lit up beneath his helm
Like a great fire seen far out at sea,
And taking my two hands, he bade me, Guido,
To rear you worthy of him, so I have reared you
To revenge his death upon the friend who
sold him.

GUIDO

Thou hast done well; I for my father thank you.
And now his name?

MORANZONE

How you remind me of him,
You have each gesture that your father had.

GUIDO

The traitor's name?

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

MORANZONE

ACT I.

Thou wilt hear that anon;
The Duke and other nobles at the Court
Are coming hither.

GUIDO

What of that? his name?

MORANZONE

Do they not seem a valiant company
Of honourable, honest gentlemen?

GUIDO

His name, milord?

(Enter the DUKE OF PADUA with COUNT
BARDI, MAFFIO, PETRUCCI, and other
gentlemen of his Court.)

MARANZONE (quickly)

The man to whom I kneel
Is he who sold your father! mark me well.

GUIDO (clutches his dagger)

The Duke!

MARANZONE

Leave off that fingering of thy knife.
Hast thou so soon forgotten?

(Kneels to the DUKE.)
My noble Lord.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT I. DUKE

Welcome, Count Moranzone; 'tis some time
Since we have seen you here in Padua.
We hunted near your castle yesterday—
Call you it castle? that bleak house of yours
Wherein you sit a-mumbling o'er your beads,
Telling your vices like a good old man.
[I trust I'll never be a good old man.
God would grow weary if I told my sins.]

(Catches sight of GUIDO and starts back.)
Who is that?

MARANZONE

My sister's son, your Grace,
Who being now of age to carry arms,
Would for a season tarry at your Court.

DUKE (*still looking at GUIDO*)
What is his name?

MARANZONE

Guido Ferranti, sir.

DUKE
His city?

MORANZONE

He is Mantuan by birth.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

DUKE (*advancing towards GUIDO*)

ACT I.

You have the eyes of one I used to know,
But he died childless [So, sir, you would serve
me ;

Well, we lack soldiers ;] are you honest, boy ?
Then be not spendthrift of your honesty,
But keep it to yourself ; in Padua
Men think that honesty is ostentatious, so
It is not of the fashion. Look at these lords
[Smelling of civet and the pomander box. . . .]

COUNT BARDI (*aside*)

Here is some bitter arrow for us, sure.

DUKE

Why, every man among them has his price,
Although, to do them justice, some of them
Are quite expensive.

COUNT BARDI (*aside*)

There it comes indeed.

DUKE

So be not honest ; eccentricity
Is not a thing should ever be encouraged,
Although, in this dull stupid age of ours,
The most eccentric thing a man can do

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT I. Is to have brains, then the mob mocks at him ;
And for the mob, despise it as I do,
I hold its bubble praise and windy favours
In such account, that popularity
Is the one insult I have never suffered.

MAFFIO (*aside*)

He has enough of hate, if he needs that.

DUKE

Have prudence ; in your dealings with the world
Be not too hasty ; act on the second thought,
First impulses are generally good.

GUIDO (*aside*)

Surely a toad sits on his lips, and spills its venom there.

DUKE

See thou hast enemies,
Else will the world think very little of thee,
It is its test of power ; yet see you show
A smiling mask of friendship to all men,
Until you have them safely in your grip,
Then you can crush them.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

GUIDO (*aside*)

ACT I.

O wise philosopher !

That for thyself dost dig so deep a grave.

MORANZONE (*to him*)

Dost thou mark his words ?

GUIDO

O, be thou sure I do.

DUKE

And be not over-scrupulous ; clean hands
With nothing in them make a sorry show.
If you would have the lion's share of life
You must wear the fox's skin ; Oh, it will fit
you ;

It is a coat which fitteth every man,
[The fat, the lean, the tall man, and the short,
Whoever makes that coat, boy, is a tailor
That never lacks a customer.]

GUIDO

Your Grace,

I shall remember.

DUKE

That is well, boy, well.

I would not have about me shallow fools,

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT L Who with mean scruples weigh the gold of life,
And faltering, paltering, end by failure ; failure,
The only crime which I have not committed : I would have *men* about me. As for conscience,
Conscience is but the name which cowardice Fleeing from battle scrawls upon its shield.
You understand me, boy ?

GUIDO

I do, your Grace,
And will in all things carry out the creed
Which you have taught me.

MAFFIO

I never heard your Grace
So much in the vein for preaching ; let the Cardinal
Look to his laurels, sir.

DUKE

The Cardinal !
Men follow my creed, and they gabble his.
I do not think much of the Cardinal ;
Although he is a holy churchman, and

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

I quite admit his dulness. Well, sir, from ACT I.
now

We count you of our household.

(*He holds out his hand for GUIDO to kiss.*
GUIDO starts back in horror, but at a
gesture from COUNT MORANZONE, kneels
and kisses it.)

We will see

That you are furnished with such equipage
As doth befit your honour and our state.

GUIDO

I thank your Grace most heartily.

DUKE

Tell me again

What is your name?

GUIDO

Guido Ferranti, sir.

DUKE

And you are Mantuan? Look to your wives,
my lords,

When such a gallant comes to Padua.

Thou dost well to laugh, Count Bardi; I have
noted

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT I. How merry is that husband by whose hearth
Sits an uncomely wife.

MAFFIO

May it please your Grace,
The wives of Padua are above suspicion.

DUKE

What, are they so ill-favoured ! Let us go,
This Cardinal detains our pious Duchess ;
His sermon and his beard want cutting both :
Will you come with us, sir, and hear a text
From holy Jerome ?

MORANZONE (*bowing*)

My liege, there are some matters——

DUKE (*interrupting*)

Thou need'st make no excuse for missing mass.
Come, gentlemen.

(*Exit with his suite into Cathedral.*)

GUIDO (*after a pause*)

So the Duke sold my father;
I kissed his hand.

MORANZONE

Thou shalt do that many times.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

GUIDO

ACT I

Must it be so ?

MORANZONE

Ay ! thou hast sworn an oath.

GUIDO

That oath shall make me marble.

MORANZONE

Farewell, boy,
Thou wilt not see me till the time is ripe.

GUIDO

I pray thou comest quickly.

MORANZONE

I will come
When it is time ; be ready.

GUIDO

Fear me not.

MORANZONE

Here is your friend ; see that you banish him
Both from your heart and Padua.

GUIDO

From Padua,
Not from my heart.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT I. MORANZONE

Nay, from thy heart as well,
I will not leave thee till I see thee do it.

GUIDO

Can I have no friend ?

MORANZONE

Revenge shall be thy friend,
Thou need'st no other.

GUIDO

Well, then be it so.

(Enter ASCANIO CRISTOFANO.)

ASCANIO

Come, Guido, I have been beforehand with you in everything, for I have drunk a flagon of wine, eaten a pasty, and kissed the maid who served it. Why, you look as melancholy as a schoolboy who cannot buy apples, or a politician who cannot sell his vote. What news, Guido, what news ?

GUIDO

Why, that we two must part, Ascanio.

ASCANIO

That would be news indeed, but it is not true.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

GUIDO

ACT L

Too true it is, you must get hence, Ascanio,
And never look upon my face again.

ASCANIO

No, no ; indeed you do not know me, Guido ;
'Tis true I am a common yeoman's son,
Nor versed in fashions of much courtesy ;
But, if you are nobly born, cannot I be
Your serving man ? I will tend you with
more love
Than any hired servant.

GUIDO (*clasping his hand*)

Ascanio !

(*Sees MORANZONE looking at him and drops
ASCANIO'S hand.*)

It cannot be.

ASCANIO

What, is it so with you ?

I thought the friendship of the antique world
Was not yet dead, but that the Roman type
Might even in this poor and common age
Find counterparts of love ; then by this love
Which beats between us like a summer sea,

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT I. Whatever lot has fallen to your hand
May I not share it ?

GUIDO

Share it ?

ASCANIO

Ay !

GUIDO

No, no.

ASCANIO

Have you then come to some inheritance
Of lordly castle, or of stored-up gold ?

GUIDO (*bitterly*)

Ay ! I have come to my inheritance.
O bloody legacy ! and O murderous dole !
Which, like the thrifty miser, must I hoard,
And to my own self keep ; and so, I pray you,
Let us part here.

ASCANIO

What, shall we never more
Sit hand in hand, as we were wont to sit,
Over some book of ancient chivalry
Stealing a truant holiday from school,

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

Follow the huntsmen through the autumn ACT I
woods,
And watch the falcons burst their tasselled
jesses,
When the hare breaks from covert.

GUIDO

Never more.

ASCANIO

Must I go hence without a word of love ?

GUIDO

You must go hence, and may love go with
you.

ASCANIO

You are unknightly, and ungenerous.

GUIDO

Unknightly and ungenerous if you will.
Why should we waste more words about the
matter !

Let us part now.

ASCANIO

Have you no message, Guido ?

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT I. GUIDO

None ; my whole past was but a schoolboy's dream,
To-day my life begins. Farewell.

ASCANIO

Farewell (*exit slowly*).

GUIDO

Now are you satisfied ? Have you not seen
My dearest friend, and my most loved companion,
Thrust from me like a common kitchen knave !
Oh, that I did it ! Are you not satisfied ?

MORANZONE

Ay ! I am satisfied. Now I go hence,
[Back to my lonely castle on the hill]
Do not forget the sign, your father's dagger,
And do the business when I send it to you.

GUIDO

Be sure I shall. (*Exit LORD MORANZONE.*)

GUIDO

O thou eternal heaven !
If there is aught of nature in my soul,

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

Of gentle pity, or fond kindliness,
Wither it up, blast it, bring it to nothing,
Or if thou wilt not, then will I myself
Cut pity with a sharp knife from my heart
And strangle mercy in her sleep at night
Lest she speak to me. Vengeance there I
have it.

ACT I.

Be thou my comrade and my bedfellow,
Sit by my side, ride to the chase with me,
When I am weary sing me pretty songs,
When I am light o' heart, make jest with
me,
And when I dream, whisper into my ear
The dreadful secret of a father's murder—
Did I say murder? *(Draws his dagger.)*

Listen, thou terrible God!

Thou God that punishest all broken oaths,
And bid some angel write this oath in fire,
That from this hour, till my dear father's
murder

In blood I have revenged, I do forswear
The noble ties of honourable friendship,
The noble joys of dear companionship,
Affection's bonds, and loyal gratitude,
Ay, more, from this same hour I do for-
swear

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT I. All love of women, and the barren thing
Which men call beauty——

*(The organ peals in the Cathedral, and under
a canopy of cloth of silver tissue, borne
by four pages in scarlet, the DUCHESS OF
PADUA comes down the steps; as she
passes across their eyes meet for a moment,
and as she leaves the stage she looks back
at GUIDO, and the dagger falls from his
hand.)*

Oh ! who is that ?

A CITIZEN

The Duchess of Padua !

END OF ACT I.

A C T I I

ACT II

SCENE

A state room in the Ducal Palace, hung with tapestries representing the Masque of Venus ; a large door in the centre opens into a corridor of red marble, through which one can see a view of Padua ; a large canopy is set (R.C.) with three thrones, one a little lower than the others ; the ceiling is made of long gilded beams ; furniture of the period, chairs covered with gilt leather, and buffets set with gold and silver plate, and chests painted with mythological scenes. A number of the courtiers are out on the corridor looking from it down into the street below ; from the street comes the roar of a mob and cries of 'Death to the Duke' : after a little interval enter the Duke very calmly, he is leaning on the arm of Guido Ferranti ; with him enters also the Lord Cardinal ; the mob still shouting.

DUKE

No, my Lord Cardinal, I weary of her !
Why, she is worse than ugly, she is good.

MAFFIO (*excitedly*)

Your Grace, there are two thousand people
there
Who every moment grow more clamorous.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT II. DUKE

Tut, man, they waste their strength upon
their lungs!

People who shout so loud, my lords, do no-
thing,

The only men I fear are silent men.

(A yell from the people.)

You see, Lord Cardinal, how my people love
me,

[This is their serenade, I like it better
Than the soft murmurs of the amorous
lute;

Is it not sweet to listen to? *(Another yell.)*
I fear

They have become a little out of tune,
So I must tell my men to fire on them.

I cannot bear bad music!] Go, Petrucci,
And tell the captain of the guard below
To clear the square. Do you not hear me,
sir?

Do what I bid you.

(Exit PETRUCCI.)

CARDINAL

I beseech your Grace
To listen to their grievances.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

DUKE (*sitting on his throne*)

ACT II

Ay ! the peaches
Are not so big this year as they were last.
I crave your pardon, my lord Cardinal,
I thought you spake of peaches.

(*A cheer from the people.*)
What is that ?

GUIDO (*rushes to the window*)

The Duchess has gone forth into the square,
And stands between the people and the guard,
And will not let them shoot.

DUKE

The devil take her !

GUIDO (*still at the window*)

And followed by a dozen of the citizens
Has come into the Palace.

DUKE (*starting up*)

By Saint James,
Our Duchess waxes bold !

BARDI

Here comes the Duchess.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT II. DUKE

Shut that door there ; this morning air is cold.

(They close the door on the corridor.)

*(Enter the DUCHESS followed by a crowd of
meanly dressed Citizens.)*

DUCHESS *(flinging herself upon her knees)*

I do beseech your Grace to give us audience.

DUKE

[Am I a tailor, Madame, that you come
With such a ragged retinue before us ?]

DUCHESS

[I think that their rags speak their grievances
With better eloquence than I can speak.]

DUKE

What are these grievances ?

DUCHESS

Alas, my Lord,
Such common things as neither you nor I,
Nor any of these noble gentlemen,
Have ever need at all to think about ;
They say the bread, the very bread they eat,
Is made of sorry chaff

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

FIRST CITIZEN

ACT II.

Ay! so it is,

Nothing but chaff.

DUKE

And very good food too,

I give it to my horses.

DUCHESS (*restraining herself*)

They say the water,

Set in the public cisterns for their use,

[Has, through the breaking of the aqueduct,]

To stagnant pools and muddy puddles turned.

DUKE

They should drink wine; water is quite un-
wholesome.

SECOND CITIZEN

Alack, your Grace, the taxes which the
customs

Take at the city gate are grown so high

We cannot buy wine.

DUKE

Then you should bless the taxes

Which make you temperate.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT II. DUCHESS

Think, while we sit
In gorgeous pomp and state [and nothing lack
Of all that wealth and luxury can give
And many servants have to wait upon us
And tend our meanest need], gaunt poverty
Creeps through their sunless lanes, and with
sharp knives
Cuts the warm throats of children stealthily
And no word said.

THIRD CITIZEN

Ay ! marry, that is true,
My little son died yesternight from hunger,
He was but six years old ; I am so poor,
I cannot bury him.

DUKE

If you are poor,
Are you not blessed in that ? Why, poverty
Is one of the Christian virtues,
(*Turns to the CARDINAL.*)

Is it not ?

I know, Lord Cardinal, you have great
revenues,
Rich abbey-lands, and tithes, and large estates
For preaching voluntary poverty.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

DUCHESS

ACT II.

Nay but, my lord the Duke, be generous ;
While we sit here within a noble house
[With shaded porticoes against the sun,
And walls and roofs to keep the winter
out,]

There are many citizens of Padua
Who in vile tenements live so full of holes,
That the chill rain, the snow, and the rude
blast,

Are tenants also with them ; others sleep
Under the arches of the public bridges
All through the autumn nights, till the wet
mist
Stiffens their limbs, and fevers come, and
so—

DUKE

And so they go to Abraham's bosom, Madam.
They should thank me for sending them to
Heaven,
If they are wretched here.

(*To the CARDINAL.*)

Is it not said

Somewhere in Holy Writ, that every man
Should be contented with that state of life

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT II. God calls him to? Why should I change
their state,
Or meddle with an all-wise providence,
Which has apportioned that some men should
starve
And others surfeit? I did not make the
world.

FIRST CITIZEN

He hath a hard heart.

SECOND CITIZEN

Nay, be silent, neighbour;
I think the Cardinal will speak for us.

CARDINAL

True, it is Christian to bear misery,
[For out of misery God bringeth good,]
Yet it is Christian also to be kind,
[To feed the hungry, and to heal the sick,]
And there seem many evils in this town,
Which in your wisdom might your Grace
reform.

FIRST CITIZEN

What is that word reform? What does it
mean?

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

SECOND CITIZEN

ACT II.

Marry, it means leaving things as they are ; I
like it not.

DUKE

Reform, Lord Cardinal, did *you* say reform ?
There is a man in Germany called Luther,
Who would reform the Holy Catholic Church.
Have you not made him heretic, and uttered
Anathema, maranatha, against him ?

CARDINAL (*rising from his seat*)

He would have led the sheep out of the fold,
We do but ask of you to feed the sheep.

DUKE

When I have shorn their fleeces I may feed
them.

As for these rebels——

(DUCHESS *entreats him.*)

FIRST CITIZEN

That is a kind word,
He means to give us something.

SECOND CITIZEN

Is that so ?

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT II. DUKE

These ragged knaves who come before us
here,
With mouths chock-full of treason.

THIRD CITIZEN

Good my Lord,
Fill up our mouths with bread; we'll hold
our tongues.

DUKE

Ye shall hold your tongues, whether you
starve or not.

My lords, this age is so familiar grown,
That the low peasant hardly doffs his hat,
Unless you beat him; and the raw mechanic
Elbows the noble in the public streets,
[As for this rabble here, I am their scourge,
And sent by God to lash them for their sins.]

DUCHESS

[Hast thou the right? art thou so free from
sin?]

DUKE

[When sin is lashed by virtue it is nothing,
But when sin lashes sin then is God glad.]

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

DUCHESS

ACT II.

[Oh, are you not afraid ?]

DUKE

[What have I to fear ?

Being man's enemy am I not God's friend ?

(*To the Citizens.*)

Well, my good loyal citizens of Padua,]

Still as our gentle Duchess has so prayed us,

And to refuse so beautiful a beggar

Were to lack both courtesy and love,

Touching your grievances, I promise this——

FIRST CITIZEN

Marry, he will lighten the taxes !

SECOND CITIZEN

Or a dole of bread, think you, for each man ?

DUKE

That, on next Sunday, the Lord Cardinal
Shall, after Holy Mass, preach you a sermon
Upon the Beauty of Obedience.

(*Citizens murmur.*)

FIRST CITIZEN

I' faith, that will not fill our stomachs !

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT II. SECOND CITIZEN

A sermon is but a sorry sauce, when
You have nothing to eat with it,

DUCHESS

Poor people,
You see I have no power with the Duke,
But if you go into the court without,
My almoner shall from my private purse,
[Which is not ever too well stuffed with
gold,]
Divide a hundred ducats 'mongst you all.

ALMONER

[Your grace has but a hundred ducats left.]

DUCHESS

[Give what I have.]

FIRST CITIZEN

God save the Duchess, say I.

SECOND CITIZEN

God save her.

DUCHESS

And every Monday morn shall bread be set
For those who lack it.

(Citizens applaud and go out.)

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

FIRST CITIZEN (*going out*)

ACT II.

Why, God save the Duchess again !

DUKE (*calling him back*)

Come hither, fellow ! what is your name ?

FIRST CITIZEN

Dominick, sir.

DUKE

A good name ! Why were you called
Dominick ?

FIRST CITIZEN (*scratching his head*)

Marry, because I was born on Saint George's
day.

DUKE

A good reason ! here is a ducat for you !
Will you not cry for me God save the
Duke ?

FIRST CITIZEN (*feebley*)

God save the Duke.

DUKE

Nay ! louder, fellow, louder.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT II. FIRST CITIZEN (*a little louder*)

God save the Duke!

DUKE

More lustily, fellow, put more heart in
it!

Here is another ducat for you.

FIRST CITIZEN (*enthusiastically*)

God save the Duke!

DUKE (*mockingly*)

Why, gentlemen, this simple fellow's love
Touches me much. (*To the Citizen, harshly.*)
Go! (*Exit Citizen, bowing.*)
This is the way, my lords,
You can buy popularity nowadays.
Oh, we are nothing if not democratic!

(*To the DUCHESS.*)

[So] Well, Madam,
You spread rebellion 'midst our citizens,
[And by your doles and daily charities,
Have made the common people love you.
Well,

I will not have you loved.]

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

DUCHESS (*looking at GUIDO*)

ACT II.

[Indeed, my lord,

I am not.]

DUKE

[And I will not have you give
Bread to the poor merely because they are
hungry.]

DUCHESS

My Lord, the poor have rights you cannot
touch,

The right to pity, and the right to mercy.

DUKE

So, so, you argue with me? This is she,
The gentle Duchess for whose hand I yielded
Three of the fairest towns in Italy,
Pisa, and Genoa, and Orvieto.

DUCHESS

Promised, my Lord, not yielded: in that
matter

Brake you your word as ever.

DUKE

You wrong us, Madam,
There were state reasons.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT II. DUCHESS

What state reasons are there
For breaking holy promises to a state ?

DUKE

[There are wild boars at Pisa in a forest
Close to the city : when I promised Pisa
Unto your noble and most trusting father,
I had forgotten there was hunting there.]

DUCHESS

[Those who forget what honour is, forget
All things, my lord.]

DUKE

[At Genoa they say,
Indeed I doubt them not, that the red mullet
Runs larger in the harbour of that town
Than anywhere in Italy.

(*Turning to one of the Court.*)

You, my lord,
Whose gluttonous appetite is your only god,
Could satisfy our Duchess on that point.

DUCHESS

[And Orvieto ?]

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

DUKE (*yawning*)

ACT II

I cannot now recall
Why I did not surrender Orvieto
According to the word of my contract.
Maybe it was because I did not choose.

(*Goes over to the DUCHESS.*)

Why look you, Madam, you are here alone ;
[Tis many a dusty league to your grey
France,
And even there your father barely keeps
A hundred ragged squires for his Court.]
What hope have you, I say ? Which of these
lords
And noble gentlemen of Padua
Stands by thy side.

DUCHESS

There is not one.

(*GUIDO starts, but restrains himself.*)

DUKE

Nor shall be.

While I am Duke in Padua : listen, Madam,
[I am grown weary of your airs and graces,]
Being mine own, you shall do as I will,
And if it be my will you keep the house,
Why then, this palace shall your prison be ;

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT II. And if it be my will you walk abroad,
Why, you shall take the air from morn to
night.

DUCHESS

Sir, by what right——?

DUKE

Madam, my second Duchess
Asked the same question once: her monu-
ment

Lies in the chapel of Bartholomew,
Wrought in red marble; very beautiful.
Guido, your arm. Come, gentlemen, let us go
And spur our falcons for the mid-day chase.
Bethink you, Madam, you are here alone.

(*Exit the DUKE leaning on GUIDO, with his
Court.*)

DUCHESS (*looking after them*)

[Is it not strange that one who seems so fair
Should thus affect the Duke, hang on each
word

Which falls like poison from those cruel lips,
And never leave his side, as though he loved
him?

Well, well, it makes no matter unto me,

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

I am alone, and out of reach of love.]

ACT II.

The Duke said rightly that I was alone;

Deserted, and dishonoured, and defamed,

Stood ever woman so alone indeed?

Men when they woo us call us pretty
children,

Tell us we have not wit to make our lives,
And so they mar them for us. Did I say
woo?

We are their chattels, and their common
slaves,

Less dear than the poor hound that licks their
hand,

Less fondled than the hawk upon their
wrist.

Woo, did I say? bought rather, sold and
bartered,

Our very bodies being merchandise.

I know it is the general lot of women,

Each miserably mated to some man

Wrecks her own life upon his selfishness:

That it is general makes it not less bitter.

I think I never heard a woman laugh,

Laugh for pure merriment, except one
woman,

That was at night time, in the public streets.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT II. Poor soul, she walked with painted lips, and
wore

The mask of pleasure: I would not laugh like
her;

No, death were better.

(Enter GUIDO behind unobserved; the DUCHESS
flings herself down before a picture of the
Madonna.)

O Mary mother, with your sweet pale face
Bending between the little angel heads
That hover round you, have you no help for
me?

Mother of God, have you no help for
me?

GUIDO

I can endure no longer.

This is my love, and I will speak to her.
Lady, am I a stranger to your prayers?

DUCHESS (*rising*)

None but the wretched need my prayers, my
lord.

GUIDO

Then must I need them, lady.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

DUCHESS

ACT II.

How is that ?

Does not the Duke show thee sufficient
honour,

[Or dost thou lack advancement at the Court ?
Ah, sir, that lies not in my power to give you,
Being my own self held of no account.]

GUIDO

Your Grace, I lack no favours from the Duke,
Whom my soul loathes as I loathe wickedness,
But come to proffer on my bended knees,
My loyal service to thee unto death.

DUCHESS

Alas ! I am so fallen in estate
I can but give thee a poor meed of thanks.

GUIDO (*seizing her hand*)

Hast thou no love to give me ?

(*The DUCHESS starts, and GUIDO falls at her
feet.*)

O dear saint,

If I have been too daring, pardon me !
Thy beauty sets my boyish blood aflame,
And, when my reverent lips touch thy white
hand,

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT II. Each little nerve with such wild passion thrills
That there is nothing which I would not do
To gain thy love. *(Leaps up.)*

Bid me reach forth and pluck
Perilous honour from the lion's jaws,
And I will wrestle with the Nemean beast
On the bare desert! Fling to the cave of War
A gaud, a ribbon, a dead flower, something
That once has touched thee, and I'll bring it
back

Though all the hosts of Christendom were
there,

Inviolate again! ay, more than this,
Set me to scale the pallid white-faced cliffs
Of mighty England, and from that arrogant
shield

Will I raze out the lilies of your France
Which England, that sea-lion of the sea,
Hath taken from her!

O dear Beatrice,

Drive me not from thy presence! without
thee

The heavy minutes crawl with feet of lead,
But, while I look upon thy loveliness,
The hours fly like winged Mercuries
And leave existence golden.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

DUCHESS

ACT II.

I did not think
I would be ever loved : do you indeed
Love me so much as now you say you do ?

GUIDO

Ask of the sea-bird if it loves the sea,
Ask of the roses if they love the rain,
Ask of the little lark, that will not sing
Till day break, if it loves to see the day :—
And yet, these are but empty images,
Mere shadows of my love, which is a fire
So great that all the waters of the main
Can not avail to quench it. Will you not
speak ?

DUCHESS

I hardly know what I should say to you.

GUIDO

Will you not say you love me ?

DUCHESS

Is that my lesson ?
Must I say all at once ? 'Twere a good lesson
If I did love you, sir ; but, if I do not,
What shall I say then ?

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT II. GUIDO

If you do not love me,
Say, none the less, you do, for on your tongue
Falsehood for very shame would turn to truth.

DUCHESS

What if I do not speak at all? They say
Lovers are happiest when they are in doubt.

GUIDO

Nay, doubt would kill me, and if I must die,
Why, let me die for joy and not for doubt.
Oh tell me may I stay, or must I go?

DUCHESS

I would not have you either stay or go;
For if you stay you steal my love from me,
And if you go you take my love away.
Guido, though all the morning stars could
sing
They could not tell the measure of my love.
I love you, Guido.

GUIDO (*stretching out his hands*)

Oh, do not cease at all;
I thought the nightingale sang but at night;
Or if thou needst must cease, then let my lips

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

Touch the sweet lips that can such music ACT II.
make.

DUCHESS

To touch my lips is not to touch my heart.

GUIDO

Do you close that against me ?

DUCHESS

Alas ! my lord,
I have it not : the first day that I saw you
I let you take my heart away from me ;
Unwilling thief, that without meaning it
Didst break into my fenced treasury
And filch my jewel from it ! O strange theft,
Which made you richer though you knew it
not,
And left me poorer, and yet glad of it !

GUIDO (*clasping her in his arms*)

O love, love, love ! Nay, sweet, lift up your
head,
Let me unlock those little scarlet doors
That shut in music, let me dive for coral
In your red lips, and I 'll bear back a prize
Richer than all the gold the Griffin guards
In rude Armenia.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT II. DUCHESS

You are my lord,
And what I have is yours, and what I have
not
Your fancy lends me, like a prodigal
Spending its wealth on what is nothing worth.
(*Kisses him.*)

GUIDO

Methinks I am bold to look upon you thus :
The gentle violet hides beneath its leaf
And is afraid to look at the great sun
For fear of too much splendour, but my eyes,
O daring eyes ! are grown so venturous
That like fixed stars they stand, gazing at you,
And surfeit sense with beauty.

DUCHESS

Dear love, I would
You could look upon me ever, for your eyes
Are polished mirrors, and when I peer
Into those mirrors I can see myself,
And so I know my image lives in you.

GUIDO (*taking her in his arms*)
Stand still, thou hurrying orb in the high
heavens,
And make this hour immortal ! (*A pause.*)

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

DUCHESS

ACT II.

Sit down here,
A little lower than me: yes, just so, sweet,
That I may run my fingers through your
hair,
And see your face turn upwards like a flower
To meet my kiss.

Have you not sometimes noted,
When we unlock some long-disuséd room
With heavy dust and soiling mildew filled,
Where never foot of man has come for years,
And from the windows take the rusty bar,
And fling the broken shutters to the air,
And let the bright sun in, how the good
sun

Turns every grimy particle of dust
Into a little thing of dancing gold?
Guido, my heart is that long-empty room,
But you have let love in, and with its gold
Gilded all life. Do you not think that love
Fills up the sum of life?

GUIDO

Ay! without love
Life is no better than the unhewn stone
Which in the quarry lies, before the sculptor

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT II. Has set the God within it. Without love
Life is as silent as the common reeds
That through the marshes or by rivers grow,
And have no music in them.

DUCHESS

Yet out of these
The singer, who is Love, will make a pipe
And from them he draws music; so I think
Love will bring music out of any life.
Is that not true?

GUIDO

Sweet, women make it true.
There are men who paint pictures, and carve
statues,
Paul of Verona and the dyer's son,
Or their great rival, who, by the sea at Venice,
Has set God's little maid upon the stair,
White as her own white lily, and as tall,
Or Raphael, whose Madonnas are divine
Because they are mothers merely; yet I think
Women are the best artists of the world,
For they can take the common lives of men
Soiled with the money-getting of our age,
And with love make them beautiful.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

DUCHESS

ACT II.

Ah, dear,

I wish that you and I were very poor;
The poor, who love each other, are so rich.

GUIDO

Tell me again you love me, Beatrice.

DUCHESS (*fingering his collar*)

How well this collar lies about your throat.

(LORD MORANZONE *looks through the door from the corridor outside.*)

GUIDO

Nay, tell me that you love me.

DUCHESS

I remember,

That when I was a child in my dear France,
Being at Court at Fontainebleau, the King
Wore such a collar.

GUIDO

Will you not say you love me?

DUCHESS (*smiling*)

He was a very royal man, King Francis,

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT II. Yet he was not royal as you are.

Why need I tell you, Guido, that I love you?

(*Takes his head in her hands and turns his face up to her.*)

Do you not know that I am yours for ever,
Body and soul.

(*Kisses him, and then suddenly catches sight of MORANZONE and leaps up.*)

Oh, what is that? (MORANZONE disappears.)

GUIDO

What, love?

DUCHESS

Methought I saw a face with eyes of flame
Look at us through the doorway.

GUIDO

Nay, 'twas nothing:

The passing shadow of the man on guard.

(*The DUCHESS still stands looking at the window.*)

'Twas nothing, sweet.

DUCHESS

Ay! what can harm us now,

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

Who are in Love's hand ? I do not think I 'd ACT II.
care
Though the vile world should with its lackey
Slander
Trample and tread upon my life; why should I ?
They say the common field-flowers of the
field
Have sweeter scent when they are trodden
on
Than when they bloom alone, and that some
herbs
Which have no perfume, on being bruised die
With all Arabia round them ; so it is
With the young lives this dull world seeks to
crush,
It does but bring the sweetness out of them,
And makes them lovelier often. And besides,
While we have love we have the best of life :
Is it not so ?

GUIDO

Dear, shall we play or sing ?

I think that I could sing now.

DUCHESS

Do not speak,

For there are times when all existences

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT II. Seem narrowed to one single ecstasy,
And Passion sets a seal upon the lips.

GUIDO

Oh, with mine own lips let me break that seal!
You love me, Beatrice?

DUCHESS

Ay! is it not strange
I should so love mine enemy?

GUIDO

Who is he?

DUCHESS

Why, you: that with your shaft didst pierce
my heart!

Poor heart, that lived its little lonely life
Until it met your arrow.

GUIDO

Ah, dear love,
I am so wounded by that bolt myself
That with unintended wounds I lie a-dying,
Unless you cure me, dear Physician.

DUCHESS

I would not have you cured; for I am sick
With the same malady.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

GUIDO

ACT II.

Oh how I love you!
See, I must steal the cuckoo's voice, and tell
The one tale over.

DUCHESS

Tell no other tale!
For, if that is the little cuckoo's song,
The nightingale is hoarse, and the loud lark
Has lost its music.

GUIDO

Kiss me, Beatrice!
(*She takes his face in her hands and bends down and kisses him; a loud knocking then comes at the door, and GUIDO leaps up; enter a Servant.*)

SERVANT

A package for you, sir.

GUIDO (*carelessly*)

Ah! give it to me.

(*Servant hands package wrapped in vermillion silk, and exit; as GUIDO is about to open it the DUCHESS comes up behind, and in sport takes it from him.*)

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT II. DUCHESS (*laughing*)

Now I will wager it is from some girl
Who would have you wear her favour ; I am
so jealous

I will not give up the least part in you,
But like a miser keep you to myself,
And spoil you perhaps in keeping.

GUIDO

It is nothing.

DUCHESS

Nay, it is from some girl.

GUIDO

You know 'tis not.

DUCHESS (*turns her back and opens it*)

Now, traitor, tell me what does this sign
mean,

A dagger with two leopards wrought in steel?

GUIDO (*taking it from her*)

O God !

DUCHESS

I 'll from the window look, and try
If I can't see the porter's livery

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

Who left it at the gate ! I will not rest ACT II.
Till I have learned your secret.

(Runs laughing into the corridor.)

GUIDO

Oh, horrible !

Had I so soon forgot my father's death,
Did I so soon let love into my heart,
And must I banish love, and let in murder
That beats and clamours at the outer gate ?
Ay, that I must ! Have I not sworn an
oath ?

Yet not to-night ; nay, it must be to-night.
Farewell then all the joy and light of life,
All dear recorded memories, farewell,
Farewell all love ! Could I with bloody hands
Fondle and paddle with her innocent hands ?
Could I with lips fresh from this butchery
Play with her lips ? Could I with murderous
eyes

Look in those violet eyes, whose purity
Would strike mine blind, and make each eye-
ball reel

In night perpetual ? No, murder has set
A barrier between us far too high
For us to kiss across it.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT II. DUCHESS

Guido!

GUIDO

Beatrice,

You must forget that name, and banish me
Out of your life for ever.

DUCHESS (*going towards him*)

O dear love!

GUIDO (*stepping back*)

There lies a barrier between us two
We dare not pass.

DUCHESS

I dare do anything
So that you are beside me.

GUIDO

Ah! There it is,
I cannot be beside you, cannot breathe
The air you breathe; I cannot any more
Stand face to face with beauty, which un-
nerves
My shaking heart, and makes my desperate
hand
Fail of its purpose. Let me go hence, I pray;
Forget you ever looked upon me.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

DUCHESS

ACT II.

What!

With your hot kisses fresh upon my lips
Forget the vows of love you made to me?

GUIDO

I take them back!

DUCHESS

Alas, you cannot, Guido,
For they are part of nature now; the air
Is tremulous with their music, and outside
The little birds sing sweeter for those vows.

GUIDO

There lies a barrier between us now,
Which then I knew not, or I had forgot.

DUCHESS

There is no barrier, Guido; why, I will go
In poor attire, and will follow you
Over the world.

GUIDO (*wildly*)

The world's not wide enough
To hold us two! Farewell, farewell for ever.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT II. DUCHESS (*calm, and controlling her passion*)

Why did you come into my life at all, then,
Or in the desolate garden of my heart
Sow that white flower of love——?

GUIDO

O Beatrice!

DUCHESS

Which now you would dig up, uproot, tear
out,

Though each small fibre doth so hold my
heart

That if you break one, my heart breaks
with it?

Why did you come into my life? Why
open

The secret wells of love I had sealed up?

Why did you open them——?

GUIDO

O God!

DUCHESS (*clenching her hand*)

And let
The floodgates of my passion swell and burst
Till, like the wave when rivers overflow
That sweeps the forest and the farm away,

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

Love in the splendid avalanche of its might ACT II.
Swept my life with it? Must I drop by
drop

Gather these waters back and seal them up?
Alas! Each drop will be a tear, and so
Will with its saltness make life very bitter.

GUIDO

I pray you speak no more, for I must go
Forth from your life and love, and make a way
On which you cannot follow.

DUCHESS

I have heard
That sailors dying of thirst upon a raft,
Poor castaways upon a lonely sea,
Dream of green fields and pleasant water-
courses,
And then wake up with red thirst in their
throats,
And die more miserably because sleep
Has cheated them: so they die cursing sleep
For having sent them dreams: I will not
curse you
Though I am cast away upon the sea
Which men call Desolation.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT II. GUIDO

O God, God !

DUCHESS

But you will stay : listen, I love you, Guido.
(She waits a little.)

Is echo dead, that when I say I love you
There is no answer ?

GUIDO

Everything is dead,
Save one thing only, which shall die to-night !

DUCHESS

[Then I must train my lips to say farewell,
And yet I think they will not learn that
lesson,
For when I shape them for such utterance
They do but say I love you : must I chide
them ?

And if so, can my lips chide one another ?
Alas, they both are guilty, and refuse
To say the word.]

GUIDO

[Then I must say it for them,
Farewell, we two can never meet again.]

(Rushes towards her.)

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT II.

DUCHESS

If you are going, touch me not, but go.

(*Exit GUIDO.*)

[Never again, did he say never again ?

Well, well, I know my business ! I will
change

The torch of love into a funeral torch,
And with the flowers of love will strew my
bier,

And from love's songs will make a dirge,
and so

Die, as the swan dies, singing.

O misery,

If thou wert so enamoured of my life,
Why couldst thou not some other form have
borne ?

The mask of pain, and not the mask of love,
The raven's voice, and not the nightingale's,
The blind mole's eyes, and not those agate
eyes

Which, like the summer heavens, were so blue
That one could fancy one saw God in them,
So, misery, I had known thee.]

Barrier ! Barrier !

Why did he say there was a barrier ?

There is no barrier between us two.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT II. He lied to me, and shall I for that reason
Loathe what I love, and what I worshipped,
hate ?
I think we women do not love like that.
For if I cut his image from my heart,
My heart would, like a bleeding pilgrim,
follow
That image through the world, and call it
back
With little cries of love.
(Enter DUKE equipped for the chase, with
falconers and hounds.)

DUKE

Madam, you keep us waiting ;
You keep my dogs waiting.

DUCHESS

I will not ride to-day.

DUKE

How now, what's this ?

DUCHESS

My Lord, I cannot go.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

DUKE

ACT II.

What, pale face, do you dare to stand against
me?

Why, I could set you on a sorry jade
And lead you through the town, till the low
rabble

You feed toss up their hats and mock at you.

DUCHESS

Have you no word of kindness ever for me?

DUKE

[Kind words are lime to snare our enemies!] I hold you in the hollow of my hand
And have no need on you to waste kind
words.

DUCHESS

Well, I will go.

DUKE (*slapping his boot with his whip*)

No, I have changed my mind,
You will stay here, and like a faithful wife
Watch from the window for our coming back.
Were it not dreadful if some accident
By chance should happen to your loving Lord?
Come, gentlemen, my hounds begin to chafe,

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT II. And I chafe too, having a patient wife.
Where is young Guido ?

MAFFIO

My liege, I have not seen him
For a full hour past.

DUKE

It matters not,
I dare say I shall see him soon enough.
Well, Madam, you will sit at home and spin.
I do protest, sirs, the domestic virtues
Are often very beautiful in others.

(Exit DUKE with his Court.)

DUCHESS

The stars have fought against me, that is all,
And thus to-night when my Lord lieth asleep,
Will I fall upon my dagger, and so cease.
My heart is such a stone nothing can reach it
Except the dagger's edge : let it go there,
To find what name it carries : ay ! to-night
Death will divorce the Duke ; and yet to-
night

He may die also, he is very old.
Why should he not die ? Yesterday his hand
Shook with a palsy : men have died from palsy,

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

And why not he? Are there not fevers also, ACT II.
Agues and chills, and other maladies

Most incident to old age?

No, no, he will not die, he is too sinful;

Honest men die before their proper time.

Good men will die: men by whose side the
Duke

In all the sick pollution of his life

Seems like a leper: women and children
die,

But the Duke will not die, he is too sinful.

Oh, can it be

There is some immortality in sin,

Which virtue has not? And does the wicked
man

Draw life from what to other men were
death,

Like poisonous plants that on corruption
live?

No, no, I think God would not suffer that:

Yet the Duke will not die: he is too sinful.

But I will die alone, and on this night

Grim Death shall be my bridegroom, and the
tomb

My secret house of pleasure: well, what of
that?

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT II. The world's a graveyard, and we each, like coffins,

Within us bear a skeleton.

(Enter LORD MORANZONE *all in black; he passes across the back of the stage looking anxiously about.*)

MORANZONE

Where is Guido?

I cannot find him anywhere.

DUCHESS (*catches sight of him*)

O God!

'Twas thou who took my love away from me.

MORANZONE (*with a look of joy*)

What, has he left you?

DUCHESS

Nay, you know he has.

Oh, give him back to me, give him back, I say,
Or I will tear your body limb from limb,
And to the common gibbet nail your head
Until the carrion crows have stripped it bare.
Better you had crossed a hungry lioness
Before you came between me and my love.

(*With more pathos.*)

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

Nay, give him back, you know not how I ACT II.
love him,

Here by this chair he knelt a half hour since,
'Twas there he stood, and there he looked at
me,

This is the hand he kissed [these are the lips
His lips made havoc of], and these the ears
Into whose open portals he did pour
A tale of love so musical that all
The birds stopped singing ! Oh give him back
to me.

MORANZONE

He does not love you, Madam.

DUCHESS

May the plague
Wither the tongue that says so ! Give him
back.

MORANZONE

Madam, I tell you you will never see him,
Neither to-night, nor any other night.

DUCHESS

What is your name ?

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT II. MORANZONE

My name? Revenge!

(*Exit.*)

DUCHESS

Revenge!

I think I never harmed a little child.

What should Revenge do coming to my door?

It matters not, for Death is there already,

Waiting with his dim torch to light my
way.

'Tis true men hate thee, Death, and yet I
think

Thou wilt be kinder to me than my lover,

And so dispatch the messengers at once,

Hurry the lazy steeds of lingering day,

And let the night, thy sister, come instead,

And drape the world in mourning; let the owl.

Who is thy minister, scream from his tower

And wake the toad with hooting, and the
bat,

That is the slave of dim Persephone,

Wheel through the sombre air on wandering
wing!

Tear up the shrieking mandrakes from the
earth

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

And bid them make us music, and tell the **ACT II.**
mole

To dig deep down thy cold and narrow bed,
For I shall lie within thine arms to-night.

END OF ACT II.

A C T I I I

ACT III

SCENE

A large corridor in the Ducal Palace: a window (L.C.) looks out on a view of Padua by moonlight: a staircase (R.C.) leads up to a door with a portière of crimson velvet, with the Duke's arms embroidered in gold on it: on the lowest step of the staircase a figure draped in black is sitting: the hall is lit by an iron cresset filled with burning tow: thunder and lightning outside: the time is night.

(Enter GUIDO through the window.)

GUIDO

The wind is rising: how my ladder shook!
I thought that every gust would break the
cords! *(Looks out at the city.)*

Christ! What a night:
Great thunder in the heavens, and wild light-
nings
Striking from pinnacle to pinnacle
Across the city, till the dim houses seem

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT III. To shudder and to shake as each new glare
Dashes adown the street.

(Passes across the stage to foot of stair-case.)

Ah! who art thou
That sittest on the stair, like unto Death
Waiting a guilty soul? *(A pause.)*
Canst thou not speak?
Or has this storm laid palsy on your tongue,
And chilled your utterance? [Get from my
path,
For I have certain business in yon chamber,
Which I must do alone.]

(The figure rises and takes off his mask.)

MORANZONE

Guido Ferranti,
Thy murdered father laughs for joy to-night.

GUIDO (*confusedly*)
What, art thou here?

MORANZONE

Ay, waiting for your coming

GUIDO (*looking away from him*)
I did not think to see you, but am glad,

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

That thou mayest know the [very] thing I ACT III.
mean to do.

MORANZONE

First, I would have you know my well-laid
plans;

Listen: I have set horses at the gate
Which leads to Parma: when thou hast done
thy business

We will ride hence, and by to-morrow night
[If our good horses fail not by the way?
Parma will see us coming; I have advised
Many old friends of your great father there,
Who have prepared the citizens for revolt.
With money, and with golden promises,
The which we need not keep, I have bought
over

Many that stand by this usurping Duke.
As for the soldiers, they, the Duke being
dead,
Will fling allegiance to the winds, so thou
Shalt sit again within thy father's palace,
As Parma's rightful lord.]

GUIDO

It cannot be.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT III. MORANZONE

Nay, but it shall.

GUIDO

Listen, Lord Moranzone,
I am resolved not to kill this man.

MORANZONE

Surely my ears are traitors, speak again :
It cannot be but age has dulled my powers,
I am an old man now : what did you say ?
You said that with that dagger in your belt
You would avenge your father's bloody
murder ;
Did you not say that ?

GUIDO

No, my lord, I said
I was resolved not to kill the Duke.

MORANZONE

You said not that ; it is my senses mock me ;
Or else this midnight air o'ercharged with
storm
Alters your message in the giving it.

GUIDO

Nay, you heard rightly ; I 'll not kill this man.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

MORANZONE

ACT III.

What of thine oath, thou traitor, what of thine
oath ?

GUIDO

I am resolved not to keep that oath.

MORANZONE

What of thy murdered father ?

GUIDO

Dost thou think
My father would be glad to see me coming,
This old man's blood still hot upon mine
hands ?

MORANZONE

Ay ! he would laugh for joy.

GUIDO

I do not think so,
There is better knowledge in the other
world ;
Vengeance is God's, let God himself revenge.

MORANZONE

Thou art God's minister of vengeance.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT III. GUIDO

No!

God hath no minister but his own hand.
I will not kill this man.

MORANZONE

Why are you here,
If not to kill him, then ?

GUIDO

Lord Moranzone,
I purpose to ascend to the Duke's chamber,
And as he lies asleep lay on his breast
The dagger and this writing ; when he awakes
Then he will know who held him in his power
And slew him not : this is the noblest vengeance
Which I can take.

MORANZONE

You will not slay him ?

GUIDO

No.

MORANZONE

Ignoble son of a noble father,

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

Who sufferest this man who sold that father ACT III.
To live an hour.

GUIDO

"Twas thou that hindered me;
I would have killed him in the open square,
The day I saw him first.

MORANZONE

It was not yet time;
Now it is time, and, like some green-faced girl,
Thou pratest of forgiveness.

GUIDO

No! revenge:
The right revenge my father's son should take.

MORANZONE

[O wretched father, thus again betrayed,
And by thine own son too!]: You are a coward,
Take out the knife, get to the Duke's chamber,
And bring me back his heart upon the blade.
When he is dead, then you can talk to me
Of noble vengeance.

GUIDO

Upon thine honour,
And by the love thou bearest my father's name,

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT III. Dost thou think my father, that great gentleman,

That generous soldier, that most chivalrous lord,
Would have crept at night-time, like a common thief,

And stabbed an old man sleeping in his bed,
However he had wronged him : tell me that.

MORANZONE (*after some hesitation*)

You have sworn an oath, see that you keep
that oath.

Boy, do you think I do not know your secret,
Your traffic with the Duchess ?

GUIDO

Silence, liar !

The very moon in heaven is not more chaste,
Nor the white stars so pure.

MORANZONE

And yet, you love her;
Weak fool, to let love in upon your life,
Save as a plaything.

GUIDO

You do well to talk :
Within your veins, old man, the pulse of youth

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

Throbs with no ardour. Your eyes full of ACT III.
rheum

Have against Beauty closed their filmy doors,
And your clogged ears, losing their natural
sense,

Have shut you from the music of the world.
You talk of love! You know not what it is.

MORANZONE

[Oh, in my time, boy, have I walked i' the
moon,

Swore I would live on kisses and on blisses,
Swore I would die for love, and did not die,
Wrote love bad verses; ay, and sung them
badly,

Like all true lovers: Oh, I have done the
tricks!

I know the partings and the chamberings;
We are all animals at best, and love
Is merely passion with a holy name.]

GUIDO

Now then I know you have not loved at
all.

Love is the sacrament of life; it sets
Virtue where virtue was not; cleanses men

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT III. Of all the vile pollutions of this world ;
It is the fire which purges gold from dross,
It is the fan which winnows wheat from chaff,
It is the spring which in some wintry soil
Makes innocence to blossom like a rose.
The days are over when God walked with
men,
But Love, which is His image, holds His place.
When a man loves a woman, then he knows
God's secret, and the secret of the world.
There is no house so lowly or so mean,
Which, if their hearts be pure who live in it,
Love will not enter ; but if bloody murder
Knock at the Palace gate and is let in,
Love like a wounded thing creeps out and
dies.

This is the punishment God sets on sin.
The wicked cannot love.

(A groan comes from the DUKE's chamber.)
Ah ! What is that ?

Do you not hear ? "Twas nothing.

So I think
That it is woman's mission by their love
To save the souls of men : and loving her,
My Lady, my white Beatrice, I begin
To see a nobler and a holier vengeance

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

In letting this man live, than doth reside ACT III.

In bloody deeds o' night, stabs in the dark,

And young hands clutching at a palsied
throat.

It was, I think, for love's sake that Lord
Christ,

Who was indeed himself incarnate Love,
Bade every man forgive his enemy.

MORANZONE (*sneeringly*)

That was in Palestine, not Padua;
And said for saints: I have to do with men.

GUIDO

It was for all time said.

MORANZONE

And your white Duchess,
What will she do to thank you? [Will she
not come,
And put her cheek to yours, and fondle you,
For having left her lord to plague her life?]

GUIDO

Alas, I will not see her face again.

'Tis but twelve hours since I parted from her,
So suddenly, and with such violent passion,

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT III. That she has shut her heart against me now:
No, I will never see her.

MORANZONE

What will you do ?

GUIDO

After that I have laid the dagger there,
Get hence to-night from Padua.

MORANZONE

And then ?

GUIDO

I will take service with the Doge at Venice,
And bid him pack me straightway to the
wars,

[In Holy Land against the Infidel ;]

And there I will, being now sick of life,
Throw that poor life against some desperate
spear.

(*A groan from the DUKE's chamber again.*)
Did you not hear a voice ?

MORANZONE

I always hear,
From the dim confines of some sepulchre,

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

A voice that cries for vengeance: We waste ACT III.
time,

It will be morning soon; are you resolved
You will not kill the Duke?

GUIDO

I am resolved.

MORANZONE

[Guido Ferranti, in that chamber yonder
There lies the man who sold your father's life,
And gave him to the hangman's murderous
hands.

There does he sleep: you have your father's
dagger;

Will you not kill him?]

GUIDO

[No, I will not kill him.]

MORANZONE

O wretched father, lying unavenged.

GUIDO

More wretched were thy son a murderer.

MORANZONE

Why, what is life?

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT III. GUIDO

I do not know, my lord,
I did not give it, and I dare not take it.

MORANZONE

I do not thank God often ; but I think
I thank him now that I have got no son !
And you, what bastard blood flows in your
veins
That when you have your enemy in your
grasp
You let him go ! I would that I had left you
With the dull hinds that reared you.

GUIDO

Better perhaps
That you had done so ! May be better still
I 'd not been born to this distressful world.

MORANZONE

Farewell !

GUIDO

Farewell ! Some day, Lord Moranzone,
You will understand my vengeance.

MORANZONE

Never, boy.
(*Gets out of window and exit by rope ladder.*)

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

GUIDO

ACT III

Father, I think thou knowest my resolve,
And with this nobler vengeance are content.
Father, I think in letting this man live
That I am doing what you would have done.
Father, I know not if a human voice
Can pierce the iron gateway of the dead,
Or if the dead are set in ignorance
Of what we do, or do not, for their sakes.
And yet I feel a presence in the air,
There is a shadow standing at my side,
And ghostly kisses seem to touch my lips,
And leave them holier. (*Kneels down.*)

O father, if 'tis thou,
Canst thou not burst through the decrees of
death,
And if corporeal semblance show thyself,
That I may touch thy hand !

No, there is nothing. (*Rises.*)
'Tis the night that cheats us with its phantoms,
And, like a puppet-master, makes us think
That things are real which are not. It grows
late.

Now must I to my business.

(*Pulls out a letter from his doublet and
reads it.*)

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT III.

When he wakes,

And sees this letter, and the dagger with it,
Will he not have some loathing for his life,
Repent, perchance, and lead a better life,
Or will he mock because a young man spared
His natural enemy? I do not care.
Father, it is your bidding that I do,
Your bidding, and the bidding of my love
Which teaches me to know you as you are.

(Ascends staircase stealthily, and just as he reaches out his hand to draw back the curtain the DUCHESS appears all in white. GUIDO starts back.)

DUCHESS

Guido! what do you here so late?

GUIDO

O white and spotless angel of my life,
Sure thou hast come from Heaven with a
message
That mercy is more noble than revenge?

DUCHESS

[Ay! I do pray for mercy earnestly.]

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

GUIDO

ACT III.

[O father, now I know I do your bidding,
For hand in hand with Mercy, like a God,
Has Love come forth to meet me on the way.]

DUCHESS

[I felt you would come back to me again,
Although you left me very cruelly :
Why did you leave me ? Nay, that matters
not,

For I can hold you now, and feel your heart
Beat against mine with little throbs of love :
Our hearts are two caged birds, trying to kiss
Across their cages' bars : but the time goes,
It will be morning in an hour or so ;
Let us get horses : I must post to Venice,
They will not think of looking for me there.]

[GUIDO]

Love, I will follow you across the world.

DUCHESS

[But are you sure you love me ?]

GUIDO

[Is the lark
Sure that it loves the dawn that bids it sing ?]

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT III. DUCHESS

[Could nothing ever change you ?]

GUIDO

[Nothing ever :

The shipman's needle is not set more sure
Than I am to the lodestone of your love.]

DUCHESS

There is no barrier between us now.

GUIDO

None, love, nor shall be.

DUCHESS

I have seen to that.

GUIDO

Tarry here for me.

DUCHESS

No, you are not going ?
You will not leave me as you did before ?

GUIDO

I will return within a moment's space,
But first I must repair to the Duke's chamber,

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

And leave this letter and this dagger there, ACT III.
That when he wakes—

DUCHESS

When who wakes?

GUIDO

Why, the Duke.

DUCHESS

He will not wake again.

GUIDO

What, is he dead?

DUCHESS

Ay! he is dead.

GUIDO

O God! how wonderful
Are all thy secret ways! Who would have
said

That on this very night, when I had yielded
Into thy hands the vengeance that is Thine,
Thou with thy finger should have touched
the man,
And bade him come before thy judgment
seat.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT III. DUCHESS

I have just killed him.

GUIDO (*in horror*)

Oh!

DUCHESS

He was asleep;

Come closer, love, and I will tell you all.

[Kiss me upon the mouth, and I will tell you.
You will not kiss me now?—well, you will
kiss me

When I have told you how I killed the Duke.
After you left me with such bitter words,
Feeling my life went lame without your
love.]

I had resolved to kill myself to-night.

About an hour ago I waked from sleep,
And took my dagger from beneath my
pillow,

Where I had hidden it to serve my need,
And drew it from the sheath, and felt the
edge,

And thought of you, and how I loved you,
Guido,

And turned to fall upon it, when I marked
The old man sleeping, full of years and sin;

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

There lay he muttering curses in his sleep, ACT III.
And as I looked upon his evil face
Suddenly like a flame there flashed across me,
There is the barrier which Guido spoke of:
You said there lay a barrier between us,
What barrier but he?—

I hardly know
What happened, but a steaming mist of
blood
Rose up between us two.

GUIDO

O [horrible!]

DUCHESS

[You would have said so had you seen that
mist:
And then the air rained blood] and then he
groaned,
And then he groaned no more! I only heard
The dripping of the blood upon the floor.

GUIDO

[Enough, enough.]

DUCHESS

[Will you not kiss me now?

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT III. Do you remember saying that women's love
Turns men to angels ? well, the love of man
Turns women into martyrs ; for its sake
We do or suffer anything.]

GUIDO

[O God !]

DUCHESS

[Will you not speak ?]

GUIDO

[I cannot speak at all.]

DUCHESS

[This is the knife with which I killed the
Duke.

I did not think he would have bled so
much,

But I can wash my hands in water after ;
Can I not wash my hands ? Ay, but my
soul ?]

Let us not talk of this ! Let us go hence :
Is not the barrier broken down between us ?
What would you more ? Come, it is almost
morning. (Puts her hand on GUIDO's.)

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

GUIDO (*breaking from her*)

ACT III.

O damned saint ! O angel fresh from Hell !
What bloody devil tempted thee to this !
That thou hast killed thy husband, that is
nothing—

Hell was already gaping for his soul—
But thou hast murdered Love, and in its place
Hast set a horrible and bloodstained thing,
Whose very breath breeds pestilence and
plague,
And strangles Love.

DUCHESS (*in amazed wonder*)

I did it all for you.

I would not have you do it, had you willed
it,

For I would keep you without blot or stain,
A thing unblemished, unassailed, untarnished.
Men do not know what women do for love.
Have I not wrecked my soul for your dear
sake,

Here and hereafter ?

[Oh be kind to me,

I did it all for you.]

GUIDO

No, do not touch me,

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT III. Between us lies a thin red stream of blood,
I dare not look across it: when you stabbed
him
You stabbed Love with a sharp knife to the
heart.
We cannot meet again.

DUCHESS (*wringing her hands*)

For you! For you!
I did it all for you: have you forgotten?
You said there was a barrier between us;
That barrier lies now i' the upper chamber
Upset, overthrown, beaten, and battered
down,
And will not part us ever.

GUIDO

No, you mistook:
Sin was the barrier, you have raised it up;
Crime was the barrier, you have set it there.
The barrier was murder, and your hand
Has builded it so high it shuts out heaven,
It shuts out God.

DUCHESS

I did it all for you;
You dare not leave me now: nay, Guido,
listen.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

Get horses ready, we will fly to-night.

ACT III.

The past is a bad dream, we will forget it :

Before us lies the future : will we not have

Sweet days of love beneath our vines and
laugh ?—

No, no, we will not laugh, but, when we
weep,

Well, we will weep together ; I will serve you

[Like a poor housewife, like a common
slave ;]

I will be very meek and very gentle :

You do not know me.

GUIDO

Nay, I know you now ;

Get hence, I say, out of my sight.

DUCHESS (*pacing up and down*)

O God,

How I have loved this man !

GUIDO

You never loved me.

Had it been so, Love would have [stopped]
your hand,

[Nor suffered you to stain his holy shrine,
Where none can enter but the innocent.]

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT III. DUCHESS

These are but words, words, words.

GUIDO

Get hence, I pray :

How could we sit together at Love's table ?

You have poured poison in the sacred wine,
And Murder dips his fingers in the sop.

[Rather than this I had died a thousand
deaths.]

DUCHESS

[I having done it, die a thousand deaths.]

GUIDO

[It is not death but life that you should fear.]

DUCHESS (*throws herself on her knees*)

Then slay me now ! I have spilt blood
to-night,

You shall spill more, so we go hand in
hand

To heaven or to hell. Draw your sword,
Guido,

[And traffic quickly for my life with Death,
Who is grown greedy of such merchandize.]

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

Quick, let your soul go chambering in my ACT III.
heart,

It will but find its master's image there.

Nay, if you will not slay me with your sword,
Bid me to fall upon this reeking knife,
And I will do it.

GUIDO (*wresting knife from her*)

Give it to me, I say.

O God, your very hands are wet with blood !
This place is Hell, I cannot tarry here.

DUCHESS

[Will you not raise me up before you go,
Or must I like a beggar keep my knees.]

GUIDO

I pray you let me see your face no more.

DUCHESS

Better for me I had not seen your face.

[O think it was for you I killed this man.]

(GUIDO *recoils : she seizes his hands as she kneels.*)

Nay, Guido, listen for a while :

Until you came to Padua I lived

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT III. Wretched indeed, but with no murderous thought,

Very submissive to a cruel Lord,
Very obedient to unjust commands,
As pure I think as any gentle girl
Who now would turn in horror from my hands—

You came : ah ! Guido, the first kindly words I ever heard since I had come from France Were from your lips: well, well, that is no matter.

You came, and in the passion of your eyes I read love's meaning, everything you said Touched my dumb soul to music, [and you seemed

Fair as that young Saint Michael on the wall In Santa Croce, where we go and pray.

I wonder will I ever pray again ?

Well, you were fair, and in your boyish face The morning seemed to lighten,] so I loved you.

And yet I did not tell you of my love.

'Twas you who sought me out, knelt at my feet As I kneel now at yours, and with sweet vows, (Kneels.)

Whose music seems to linger in my ears,

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

Swore that you loved me, and I trusted you. ACT III
I think there are many women in the world
[Who had they been unto this vile Duke
mated,

Chained to his side, as the poor galley slave
Is to a leper chained,—ay ! many women]
Who would have tempted you to kill the man.
I did not.

Yet I know that had I done so,
I had not been thus humbled in the dust,
(*Stands up.*)

But you had loved me very faithfully.

(*After a pause approaches him timidly.*)
I do not think you understand me, Guido :
It was for your sake that I wrought this deed
Whose horror now chills my young blood to
ice,

For your sake only.

(*Stretching out her arm.*)

Will you not speak to me ?

Love me a little : in my girlish life
I have been starved for love, and kindness
Has passed me by.

GUIDO

I dare not look at you :

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT III. You come to me with too pronounced a
favour,
Get to your tirewomen.

DUCHESS

Ay, there it is !

There speaks the man ! yet had you come to
me

With any heavy sin upon your soul,
Some murder done for hire, not for love,
Why, I had sat and watched at your bedside
All through the night-time, lest Remorse
might come

And pour his poisons in your ear, and so
Keep you from sleeping ! Sure it is the guilty,
Who, being very wretched, need love most.

GUIDO

There is no love where there is any guilt.

DUCHESS

No love where there is any guilt ! O God,
How differently do we love from men !
There is many a woman here in Padua,
Some workman's wife, or ruder artisan's,
Whose husband spends the wages of the week
In a coarse revel, or a tavern brawl,

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

And reeling home late on the Saturday night, **ACT III.**
Finds his wife sitting by a fireless hearth,
Trying to hush the child who cries for hunger,
And then sets to and beats his wife because
The child is hungry, and the fire black.
Yet the wife loves him ! and will rise next day
With some red bruise across a careworn face,
And sweep the house, and do the common
service,
And try and smile, and only be too glad
If he does not beat her a second time
Before her child !—that is how women love.

(A pause: GUIDO says nothing.)

[Do you say nothing ? Oh be kind to me
While yet I know the summer of my days.]
I think you will not drive me from your side.
Where have I got to go if you reject me ?—
You for whose sake this hand has murdered
life,
You for whose sake my soul has wrecked
itself
Beyond all hope of pardon.

GUIDO

Get thee gone :
The dead man is a ghost, and our love too,

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT III. Flits like a ghost about its desolate tomb,
And wanders through this charnel house, and
 weeps
That when you slew your lord you slew it also.
Do you not see ?

DUCHESS

I see when men love women
They give them but a little of their lives,
But women when they love give everything ;
I see that, Guido, now.

GUIDO

Away, away,
And come not back till you have waked your
dead.

DUCHESS

I would to God that I could wake the dead,
Put vision in the glazéd eyes, and give
The tongue its natural utterance, and bid
The heart to beat again : that cannot be :
For what is done, is done : and what is dead
Is dead for ever : the fire cannot warm him :
The winter cannot hurt him with its snows ;
Something has gone from him ; if you call him
 now,

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

He will not answer ; if you mock him now, ACT III.
He will not laugh ; and if you stab him now
He will not bleed.

I would that I could wake him !
O God, put back the sun a little space,
And from the roll of time blot out to-night,
And bid it not have been ! put back the sun,
And make me what I was an hour ago !
No, no, time will not stop for anything,
Nor the sun stay its courses, though Repent-
ance

Calling it back grow hoarse ; but you, my love,
Have you no word of pity even for me ?
O Guido, Guido, will you not kiss me once ?
Drive me not to some desperate resolve :
Women grow mad when they are treated
thus :

Will you not kiss me once ?

GUIDO (*holding up knife*)

[I will not kiss you

Until the blood grows dry upon this knife,
And not even then.]

DUCHESS

[Dear Christ ! how little pity
We women get in this untimely world ;

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT III. Men lure us to some dreadful precipice,
And, when we fall, they leave us.]

GUIDO (*wildly*)

Back to your dead !

DUCHESS (*going up the stairs*)

Why, then I will be gone ! and may you
find
More mercy than you showed to me to-night !

GUIDO

Let me find mercy when I go at night
And do foul murder.

DUCHESS (*coming down a few steps*)

Murder did you say ?
Murder is hungry, and still cries for more,
And Death, his brother, is not satisfied,
But walks the house, and will not go away,
Unless he has a comrade ! Tarry, Death,
For I will give thee a most faithful lackey
To travel with thee ! Murder, call no more,
For thou shalt eat thy fill.

There is a storm
Will break upon this house before the morn-
ing,
So horrible, that the white moon already

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

Turns grey and sick with terror, the low wind ACT III.
Goes moaning round the house, and the high
stars

Run madly through the vaulted firmament,
As though the night wept tears of liquid
fire

For what the day shall look upon. O weep,
Thou lamentable heaven ! Weep thy fill !
Though sorrow like a cataract drench the
fields,

And make the earth one bitter lake of tears,
It would not be enough. (*A peal of thunder.*)

Do you not hear,

[There is artillery in the Heaven to-night.]
Vengeance is wakened up, and has unloosed
His dogs upon the world, and in this matter
Which lies between us two, let him who
draws

The thunder on his head beware the ruin
Which the forked flame brings after.

(*A flash of lightning followed by a peal of
thunder.*)

GUIDO

Away ! away !

(*Exit the DUCHESS, who as she lifts the crimson*

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT III. *curtain looks back for a moment at GUIDO, but he makes no sign. More thunder.)*

Now is life fallen in ashes at my feet
And noble love self-slain ; and in its place
Crept murder with its silent bloody feet.
And she who wrought it—Oh ! and yet she
loved me,
And for my sake did do this dreadful thing.
I have been cruel to her : Beatrice !
Beatrice, I say, come back.

*(Begins to ascend staircase, when the noise of
Soldiers is heard.)*

Ah ! what is that ?
Torches ablaze, and noise of hurrying feet.
Pray God they have not seized her.

(Noise grows louder.)
Beatrice !

There is yet time to escape. Come down,
come out !

(The voice of the DUCHESS outside.)
This way went he, the man who slew my
lord.

*(Down the staircase come hurrying a con-
fused body of Soldiers ; GUIDO is not seen
at first, till the DUCHESS surrounded by
Servants carrying torches appears at the*

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

*top of the staircase, and points to GUIDO, ACT III.
who is seized at once, one of the Soldiers
dragging the knife from his hand and
showing it to the Captain of the Guard
in sight of the audience. Tableau.)*

END OF ACT III.

A C T I V

ACT IV

SCENE

The Court of Justice: the walls are hung with stamped grey velvet: above the hangings the wall is red, and gilt symbolical figures bear up the roof, which is made of red beams with grey soffits and moulding: a canopy of white satin flowered with gold is set for the Duchess: below it a long bench with red cloth for the Judges: below that a table for the clerks of the Court. Two soldiers stand on each side of the canopy, and two soldiers guard the door; the citizens have some of them collected in the Court, others are coming in greeting one another; two tipstaffs in violet keep order with long white wands.

FIRST CITIZEN

Good Morrow, neighbour Anthony.

SECOND CITIZEN

Good Morrow, neighbour Dominick.

FIRST CITIZEN

This is a strange day for Padua, is it not?
—the Duke being dead.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT IV. SECOND CITIZEN

I tell you, neighbour Dominick, I have not known such a day since the last Duke died : [and if you believe me not, I am no true man.]

FIRST CITIZEN

They will try him first, and sentence him afterwards, will they not, neighbour Anthony ?

SECOND CITIZEN

Nay, for he might 'scape his punishment then ; but they will condemn him first so that he gets his deserts, and give him trial afterwards so that no injustice is done.

FIRST CITIZEN

Well, well, it will go hard with him I doubt not.

SECOND CITIZEN

Surely it is a grievous thing to shed a Duke's blood.

THIRD CITIZEN

They say a Duke has blue blood.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

SECOND CITIZEN

ACT IV.

I think our Duke's blood was black like his soul.

FIRST CITIZEN

Have a watch, neighbour Anthony, the officer is looking at thee.

SECOND CITIZEN

I care not if he does but look at me; he cannot whip me with the lashes of his eye.

THIRD CITIZEN

What think you of this young man who stuck the knife into the Duke?

SECOND CITIZEN

Why, that he is a well-behaved, and a well-meaning, and a well-favoured lad, and yet wicked in that he killed the Duke.

THIRD CITIZEN

'Twas the first time he did it: may be the law will not be hard on him, as he did not do it before.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT IV. SECOND CITIZEN

True.

TIPSTAFF

Silence, knave.

SECOND CITIZEN

Am I thy looking-glass, Master Tipstaff,
that thou callest me knave ?

FIRST CITIZEN

Here be one of the household coming.
Well, Dame Lucy, thou art of the Court,
how does thy poor mistress the Duchess,
with her sweet face ?

MISTRESS LUCY

O well-a-day ! O miserable day ! O day !
O misery ! why it is just nineteen years last
June, at Michaelmas, since I was married to
my husband, and it is August now, and here
is the Duke murdered ; there is a coincidence
for you !

SECOND CITIZEN

Why, if it is a coincidence, they may not

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

kill the young man: there is no law against ACT IV.
coincidences.

FIRST CITIZEN

But how does the Duchess?

MISTRESS LUCY

Well, well, I knew some harm would happen to the house: six weeks ago the cakes were all burned on one side, and last Saint Martin even as ever was, there flew into the candle a big moth that had wings, and a'most scared me.

FIRST CITIZEN

But come to the Duchess, good gossip: what of her?

MISTRESS LUCY

Marry, it is time you should ask after her, poor lady; she is distraught almost. Why, she has not slept, but paced the chamber all night long. I prayed her to have a posset, or some aqua-vitæ, and to get to bed and sleep a little for her health's sake, but she answered me she was afraid she might dream. That was a strange answer, was it not?

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT IV. SECOND CITIZEN

These great folk have not much sense, so Providence makes it up to them in fine clothes.

MISTRESS LUCY

Well, well, God keep murder from us, I say, as long as we are alive.

(*Enter LORD MORANZONE hurriedly.*)

MORANZONE

Is the Duke dead ?

SECOND CITIZEN

He has a knife in his heart, which they say is not healthy for any man.

MORANZONE

Who is accused of having killed him ?

SECOND CITIZEN

Why, the prisoner, sir.

MORANZONE

But who is the prisoner ?

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

SECOND CITIZEN

ACT IV.

Why, he that is accused of the Duke's
murder.

MORANZONE

I mean, what is his name ?

SECOND CITIZEN

Faith, the same which his godfathers gave
him : what else should it be ?

TIPSTAFF

Guido Ferranti is his name, my lord.

MORANZONE

I almost knew thine answer ere you gave it.

(Aside.)

Yet it is strange he should have killed the
Duke,

Seeing he left me in such different mood.
It is most likely when he saw the man,
This devil who had sold his father's life,
That passion from their seat within his heart
Thrust all his boyish theories of love,
And in their place set vengeance; yet I
marvel

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT IV. That he escaped not.

(*Turning again to the crowd.*)
How was he taken, tell me.

THIRD CITIZEN

Marry, sir, he was taken by the heels.

MORANZONE

But who seized him ?

THIRD CITIZEN

Why, those that did lay hold of him.

MORANZONE

How was the alarm given ?

THIRD CITIZEN

That I cannot tell you, sir.

MISTRESS LUCY

It was the Duchess herself who pointed him out.

MORANZONE (*aside*)

The Duchess ! There is something strange in this.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

MISTRESS LUCY

ACT IV.

Ay! And the dagger was in his hand—the Duchess's own dagger.

MORANZONE

What did you say?

MISTRESS LUCY

Why, marry, that it was with the Duchess's dagger that the Duke was killed.

MORANZONE (*aside*)

There is some mystery about this: I cannot understand it.

SECOND CITIZEN

They be very long a-coming.

FIRST CITIZEN

I warrant they will come soon enough for the prisoner.

TIPSTAFF

Silence in the Court!

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT IV. FIRST CITIZEN

Thou dost break silence in bidding us keep it, Master Tipstaff.

(*Enter the LORD JUSTICE and the other Judges.*)

SECOND CITIZEN

Who is he in scarlet? Is he the headsman?

THIRD CITIZEN

Nay, he is the Lord Justice.

(*Enter GUIDO guarded.*)

SECOND CITIZEN

There be the prisoner surely.

THIRD CITIZEN

He looks honest.

FIRST CITIZEN

That be his villany: knaves nowadays do look so honest that honest folk are forced to look like knaves so as to be different.

(*Enter the Headsman, who takes his stand behind GUIDO.*)

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

SECOND CITIZEN

ACT IV.

Yon be the headsman then ! O Lord ! Is the axe sharp, think you ?

FIRST CITIZEN

Ay ! sharper than thy wits are ; but the edge is not towards him, mark you.

SECOND CITIZEN (*scratching his neck*)

I' faith, I like it not so near.

FIRST CITIZEN

Tut, thou need'st not be afraid ; they never cut the heads off common folk : they do but hang us. (*Trumpets outside.*)

THIRD CITIZEN

What are the trumpets for ? Is the trial over ?

FIRST CITIZEN

Nay, 'tis for the Duchess.

(Enter the DUCHESS in black velvet ; her train of flowered black velvet is carried by two pages in violet ; with her is the CARDINAL in scarlet, and the gentlemen of the Court

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT IV.

in black ; she takes her seat on the throne above the Judges, who rise and take their caps off as she enters ; the CARDINAL sits next to her a little lower ; the Courtiers group themselves about the throne.)

SECOND CITIZEN

O poor lady, how pale she is ! Will she sit there ?

FIRST CITIZEN

Ay ! she is in the Duke's place now.

SECOND CITIZEN

That is a good thing for Padua ; the Duchess is a very kind and merciful Duchess ; why, she cured my child of the ague once.

THIRD CITIZEN

Ay, and has given us bread : do not forget the bread.

A SOLDIER

Stand back, good people.

SECOND CITIZEN

If we be good, why should we stand back ?

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

TIPSTAFF

ACT IV.

Silence in the Court!

LORD JUSTICE

May it please your Grace,
Is it your pleasure we proceed to trial
Of the Duke's murder? (DUCHESS bows.)
Set the prisoner forth.
What is thy name?

GUIDO.

It matters not, my lord.

LORD JUSTICE

Guido Ferranti is thy name in Padua.

GUIDO.

A man may die as well under that name as
any other.

LORD JUSTICE

Thou art not ignorant
What dreadful charge men lay against thee
here,
Namely, the treacherous murder of thy Lord,
Simone Gesso, Duke of Padua;
What dost thou say in answer?

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT IV. GUIDO

I say nothing.

LORD JUSTICE

[Dost thou admit this accusation, then ?]

GUIDO

[I admit naught, and yet I naught deny.
I pray thee, my Lord Justice, be as brief
As the Court's custom and the laws allow.
I will not speak.]

LORD JUSTICE

[Why, then, it cannot be
That of this murder thou art innocent,
But rather that thy stony obstinate heart
Hath shut its doors against the voice of
justice.
Think not thy silence will avail thee aught,
'Twill rather aggravate thy desperate guilt,
Of which indeed we are most well assured;
Again I bid thee speak.]

GUIDO

[I will say nothing.]

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

LORD JUSTICE

ACT IV.

[Then naught remains for me but to pronounce
Upon thy head the sentence of swift Death.]

GUIDO

[I pray thee give thy message speedily,
Thou couldst not bring me anything more
dear.]

LORD JUSTICE (*rising*)

Guido Ferranti—

MORANZONE (*stepping from the crowd*)

Tarry, my Lord Justice.

LORD JUSTICE

Who art thou that bid'st justice tarry, sir ?

MORANZONE

So be it justice it can go its way ;
But if it be not justice—

LORD JUSTICE

Who is this ?

COUNT BARDI

A very noble gentleman, and well known
To the late Duke.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT IV. LORD JUSTICE

Sir, thou art come in time
To see the murder of the Duke avenged.
There stands the man who did this heinous
thing.

MORANZONE

Has merely blind suspicion fixed on him,
Or have ye any proof he did the deed ?

LORD JUSTICE

[Thrice has the Court entreated him to speak,
But surely guilt weighs heavy on the tongue,
For he says nothing in defence, nor tries
To purge himself of this most dread account,
Which innocence would surely do.]

MORANZONE

My lord,
I ask again what proof have ye ?

LORD JUSTICE (*holding up the dagger*)

This dagger,
Which from his blood-stained hands, itself all
blood,
Last night the soldiers seized : what further
proof
Need we indeed ?

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

MORANZONE

ACT IV.

(*takes the dagger and approaches the DUCHESS*)

Saw I not such a dagger

Hang from your Grace's girdle yesterday?

(*The DUCHESS shudders and makes no answer.*)

Ah! my Lord Justice, may I speak a moment
With this young man, who in such peril
stands?

LORD JUSTICE

Ay, willingly, my lord, and may you turn him
To make a full avowal of his guilt.

(*LORD MORANZONE goes over to GUIDO, who stands R. and clutches him by the hand.*)

MORANZONE (*in a low voice*)

[She did it! Nay, I saw it in her eyes.
Boy, dost thou think I'll let thy father's son
Be by this woman butchered to his death?
Her husband sold your father, and the wife
Would sell the son in turn.]

GUIDO

[*Lord Moranzone,*

I alone did this thing: be satisfied,
My father is avenged.]

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT IV. MORANZONE

[Enough, enough,
I know you did not kill him ; had it been you,
Your father's dagger, not this woman's toy,
Had done the business : see how she glares
at us !

By Heaven, I will tear off that marble mask,
And tax her with this murder before all.]

GUIDO

[You shall not do it.]

MORANZONE

[Nay, be sure I shall.]

GUIDO

[My lord, you must not dare to speak.]

MORANZONE

[Why not ?
If she is innocent she can prove it so ;
If guilty, let her die.]

GUIDO

[What shall I do ?]

MORANZONE

[Or thou or I shall tell the truth in court.]

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

GUIDO

ACT IV.

[The truth is that I did it.]

MORANZONE

[Sayest thou so ?

Well, I will see what the good Duchess says.]

GUIDO

[No, no, I 'll tell the tale.]

MORANZONE

[That is well, Guido.

Her sins be on her head and not on thine.

Did she not give you to the guard ?]

GUIDO

[She did.]

MORANZONE

[Then upon her revenge thy father's death :
She was the wife of Judas.]

GUIDO

[Ay, she was.]

MORANZONE

[I think you need no prompting now to do it,
Though you were weak and like a boy last
night.]

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT IV. GUIDO

[Weak like a boy, was I indeed last night?
Be sure I will not be like that to-day.]

LORD JUSTICE
Doth he confess ?

GUIDO
My lord, I do confess
That foul unnatural murder has been done.

FIRST CITIZEN
Why, look at that : he has a pitiful heart,
and does not like murder ; they will let him
go for that.

LORD JUSTICE
Say you no more ?

GUIDO
My lord, I say this also,
That to spill human blood is deadly sin.

SECOND CITIZEN
Marry, he should tell that to the headsman :
'tis a good sentiment.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

GUIDO

ACT IV.

Lastly, my lord, I do entreat the Court
To give me leave to utter openly
The dreadful secret of this mystery,
And to point out the very guilty one
Who with this dagger last night slew the
Duke.

LORD JUSTICE

Thou hast leave to speak.

DUCHESS (*rising*)

I say he shall not speak :
What need have we of further evidence ?
Was he not taken in the house at night
In Guilt's own bloody livery.

LORD JUSTICE (*showing her the statute*)

Your Grace

Can read the law.

DUCHESS (*waiving book aside*)

Bethink you, my Lord Justice,
Is it not very like that such a one
May, in the presence of the people here,
Utter some slanderous word against my Lord,

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT IV. Against the city, or the city's honour,
Perchance against myself.

LORD JUSTICE

My liege, the law.

DUCHESS

He shall not speak, but, with gags in his
mouth,
Shall climb the ladder to the bloody block.

LORD JUSTICE

The law, my liege.

DUCHESS

We are not bound by law,
But with it we bind others.

MORANZONE

My Lord Justice,
Thou wilt not suffer this injustice here.

LORD JUSTICE

The Court needs not thy voice, Lord Moran-
zone.

Madam, it were a precedent most evil
To wrest the law from its appointed course,
For, though the cause be just, yet anarchy

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

Might on this licence touch these golden scales ACT IV
And unjust causes unjust victories gain.

COUNT BARDI

I do not think your Grace can stay the law.

DUCHESS

Ay, it is well to preach and prate of law:
Methinks, my haughty lords of Padua,
If ye are hurt in pocket or estate,
So much as makes your monstrous revenues
Less by the value of one ferry toll,
Ye do not wait the tedious law's delay
With such sweet patience as ye counsel
me.

COUNT BARDI

Madam, I think you wrong our nobles here.

DUCHESS

I think I wrong them not. Which of ye all
Finding a thief within his house at night,
With some poor chattel thrust into his
rags,
Will stop and parley with him? do ye not
Give him unto the officer and his hook

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT IV. To be dragged gaolwards straightway ?

And so now,
Had ye been men, finding this fellow here,
With my Lord's life still hot upon his
hands,
Ye would have haled him out into the court,
And struck his head off with an axe.

GUIDO

O God !

DUCHESS

Speak, my Lord Justice.

LORD JUSTICE

Your Grace, it cannot be :
The laws of Padua are most certain here :
And by those laws the common murderer
even
May with his own lips plead, and make
defence.

DUCHESS

[Tarry a little with thy righteousness.]
This is no common murderer, Lord Justice,
But a great outlaw, and a most vile traitor,
Taken in open arms against the state.
For he who slays the man who rules a state

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

Slays the state also, widows every wife,
And makes each child an orphan, and no less
Is to be held a public enemy,
Than if he came with mighty ordonnaunce,
And all the spears of Venice at his back,
To beat and batter at our city gates—
Nay, is more dangerous to our common-
wealth

[Than gleaming spears and thundering ordon-
nance,]

For walls and gates, bastions and forts, and
things

Whose common elements are wood and stone
May be raised up, but who can raise again
The ruined body of my murdered lord,
And bid it live and laugh ?

MAFFIO

Now by Saint Paul
I do not think that they will let him speak.

JEPPO VITELLOZZO

There is much in this, listen.

DUCHESS

Wherefore now,
Throw ashes on the head of Padua,

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT IV. With sable banners hang each silent street,
Let every man be clad in solemn black,
But ere we turn to these sad rites of mourning
Let us bethink us of the desperate hand
Which wrought and brought this ruin on our
state,
And straightway pack him to that narrow
house,
Where no voice is, but with a little dust
Death fills right up the lying mouths of men.

GUIDO

Unhand me, knaves ! I tell thee, my Lord
Justice,
Thou mightst as well bid the untrammelled
ocean,
The winter whirlwind, or the Alpine storm,
Nor roar their will, as bid me hold my peace !
Ay ! though ye put your knives into my
throat,
Each grim and gaping wound shall find a
tongue,
And cry against you.

LORD JUSTICE

Sir, this violence
Avails you nothing ; for save the tribunal

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

Give thee a lawful right to open speech,
Naught that thou sayest can be credited.

ACT IV.

(*The DUCHESS smiles and GUIDO falls back with a gesture of despair.*)

Madam, myself, and these wise Justices,
Will with your Grace's sanction now retire
Into another chamber, to decide
Upon this difficult matter of the law,
And search the statutes and the precedents.

DUCHESS

Go, my Lord Justice, search the statutes
well,
Nor let this brawling traitor have his way.

MORANZONE

Go, my Lord Justice, search thy conscience
well,
Nor let a man be sent to death unheard.

(*Exit the LORD JUSTICE and the Judges.*)

DUCHESS

Silence, thou evil genius of my life !
Thou com'st between us two a second time ;
This time, my lord, I think the turn is mine.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT IV. GUIDO

I shall not die till I have uttered voice.

DUCHESS

Thou shalt die silent, and thy secret with thee.

GUIDO

Art thou that Beatrice, Duchess of Padua ?

DUCHESS

I am what thou hast made me; look at me well,

I am thy handiwork.

MAFFIO

See, is she not
Like that white tigress which we saw at
Venice,
Sent by some Indian soldan to the Doge.

JEPPO

Hush ! she may hear thy chatter.

HEADSMAN

My young fellow,
I do not know why thou shouldst care to
speak,

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

Seeing my axe is close upon thy neck, ACT IV.
And words of thine will never blunt its edge.
But if thou art so bent upon it, why
Thou mightest plead unto the Churchman
yonder:

The common people call him kindly here,
Indeed I know he has a kindly soul.

GUIDO

This man, whose trade is death, hath cour-
tesies
More than the others.

HEADSMAN

Why, God love you, sir,
I'll do you your last service on this earth.

GUIDO

My good Lord Cardinal, in a Christian land,
With Lord Christ's face of mercy looking
down
From the high seat of Judgment, shall a
man
Die unabsolved, unshrived? And if not so
May I not tell this dreadful tale of sin,
If any sin there be upon my soul.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT IV. DUCHESS

Thou dost but waste thy time.

CARDINAL

Alack, my son,
I have no power with the secular arm.
My task begins when justice has been done,
To urge the wavering sinner to repent
And to confess to Holy Church's ear
The dreadful secrets of a sinful mind.

DUCHESS

Thou mayest speak to the confessional
Until thy lips grow weary of their tale,
But here thou shalt not speak.

GUIDO

My reverend father,
You bring me but cold comfort.

CARDINAL

Nay, my son,
For the great power of our mother Church,
Ends not with this poor bubble of a world,
Of which we are but dust, as Jerome saith,
For if the sinner doth repentant die,
Our prayers and holy masses much avail
To bring the guilty soul from purgatory.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

DUCHESS

ACT IV.

And when in purgatory thou seest my Lord
With that red star of blood upon his heart,
Tell him I sent thee hither.

GUIDO

O dear God !

MORANZONE

This is the woman, is it, whom you loved ?

CARDINAL

Your Grace is very cruel to this man.

DUCHESS

No more than he was cruel to her Grace.

CARDINAL

[Ay ! he did slay your husband.

DUCHESS

Ay ! he did.]

CARDINAL

Yet mercy is the sovereign right of princes.

DUCHESS

I got no mercy, and I give it not.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT IV. He hath changed my heart into a heart of stone,
He hath sown rank nettles in a goodly field,
He hath poisoned the wells of pity in my breast,
He hath withered up all kindness at the root;
My life is as some famine-murdered land,
Whence all good things have perished utterly:
I am what he hath made me.

[*The DUCHESS weeps.*]

JEPPO

Is it not strange
That she should so have loved the wicked
Duke?

MAFFIO

It is most strange when women love their lords,
And when they love them not it is most strange.

JEPPO

What a philosopher thou art, Petrucci!

MAFFIO

Ay! I can bear the ills of other men,
Which is philosophy.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

DUCHESS

ACT IV.

They tarry long,
These greybeards and their council ; bid them
come ;
Bid them come quickly, else I think my heart
Will beat itself to bursting : not indeed,
That I here care to live ; God knows my life
Is not so full of joy, yet, for all that,
I would not die companionless, or go
Lonely to Hell.

Look, my Lord Cardinal,
Canst thou not see across my forehead here,
In scarlet letters writ, the word Revenge ?
Fetch me some water, I will wash it off :
'Twas branded there last night, but in the
daytime
I need not wear it, need I, my Lord Cardinal ?
Oh how it sears and burns into my brain :
Give me a knife ; not that one, but another,
And I will cut it out.

CARDINAL

It is most natural
To be incensed against the murderous hand
That treacherously stabbed your sleeping
lord.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT IV DUCHESS

I would, old Cardinal, I could burn that hand;
But it will burn hereafter.

CARDINAL

Nay, the Church
Ordains us to forgive our enemies.

DUCHESS

Forgiveness? what is that? I never got it.
They come at last: well, my Lord Justice,
well. *(Enter the Lord Justice.)*

LORD JUSTICE

Most gracious Lady, and our sovereign Liege,
We have long pondered on the point at issue,
And much considered of your Grace's wisdom,
And never wisdom spake from fairer lips——

DUCHESS

Proceed, sir, without compliment.

LORD JUSTICE

We find,
As your own Grace did rightly signify,
That any citizen, who by force or craft
Conspires against the person of the Liege,
Is *ipso facto* outlaw, void of rights

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

Such as pertain to other citizens,
Is traitor, and a public enemy,
Who may by any casual sword be slain
Without the slayer's danger, nay if brought
Into the presence of the tribunal,
Must with dumb lips and silence reverent
Listen unto his well-deserved doom,
Nor has the privilege of open speech.

ACT IV.

DUCHESS

I thank thee, my Lord Justice, heartily ;
I like your law : and now I pray dispatch
This public outlaw to his righteous doom ;
[For I am weary, and the headsman weary,]
What is there more ?

LORD JUSTICE

Ay, there is more, your Grace.
This man being alien born, not Paduan,
Nor by allegiance bound unto the Duke,
Save such as common nature doth lay down,
Hath, though accused of treasons manifold,
Whose slightest penalty is certain death,
Yet still the right of public utterance
Before the people and the open court,
Nay, shall be much entreated by the Court,
To make some formal pleading for his life,

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT IV. Lest his own city, righteously incensed,
Should with an unjust trial tax our state,
And wars spring up against the common-
wealth :
So merciful are the laws of Padua
Unto the stranger living in her gates.

DUCHESS

Being of my Lord's household, is he stranger
here ?

LORD JUSTICE

Ay, until seven years of service spent
He cannot be a Paduan citizen.

GUIDO

I thank thee, my Lord Justice, heartily ;
I like your law.

SECOND CITIZEN

I like no law at all :
Were there no law there'd be no law-breakers,
So all men would be virtuous.

FIRST CITIZEN

So they would ;
'Tis a wise saying that, and brings you far.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

TIPSTAFF

ACT IV.

Ay ! to the gallows, knave.

DUCHESS

Is this the law ?

LORD JUSTICE

It is the law most certainly, my liege.

DUCHESS

Show me the book : 'tis written in blood-red.

JEPPO

Look at the Duchess.

DUCHESS

Thou accursed law,
I would that I could tear thee from the state
As easy as I tear thee from this book.

(Tears out the page.)

Come here, Count Bardi : are you honourable ?
Get a horse ready for me at my house,
For I must ride to Venice instantly.

BARDI

To Venice, Madam ?

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT IV. DUCHESS

Not a word of this,
Go, go at once. *(Exit COUNT BARDI.)*

A moment, my Lord Justice.
If, as thou sayest it, this is the law—
Nay, nay, I doubt not that thou sayest right,
Though right be wrong in such a case as this—
May I not by the virtue of mine office
Adjourn this court until another day ?

LORD JUSTICE

Madam, you cannot stay a trial for blood.

DUCHESS

I will not tarry then to hear this man
Rail with rude tongue against our sacred per-
son.
[I have some business also in my house
Which I must do:] Come, gentlemer

LORD JUSTICE

My liege,
You cannot leave this court until the prisoner
Be purged or guilty of this dread offence.

DUCHESS

Cannot, Lord Justice? By what right do you

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

Set barriers in my path where I should go ? ACT IV.
Am I not Duchess here in Padua,
And the state's regent ?

LORD JUSTICE

For that reason, Madam,
Being the fountain-head of life and death
Whence, like a mighty river, justice flows,
Without thy presence justice is dried up
And fails of purpose : thou must tarry here.

DUCHESS

What, wilt thou keep me here against my
will ?

LORD JUSTICE

We pray thy will be not against the law.

DUCHESS

What if I force my way out of the court ?

LORD JUSTICE

Thou canst not force the Court to give thee
way.

DUCHESS

I will not tarry.

(Rises from her seat.)

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT IV. LORD JUSTICE

Is the usher here?

Let him stand forth. (*Usher comes forward.*)

Thou knowest thy business, sir.

(*The Usher closes the doors of the court, which are L., and when the DUCHESS and her retinue approach, kneels down.*)

USHER

In all humility I beseech your Grace

Turn not my duty to courtesy,

Nor make my unwelcome office an offence.

[The self-same laws which make your Grace
the Regent

Bid me watch here: my Liege, to break those
laws

Is but to break thine office and not mine.]

DUCHESS

Is there no gentleman amongst you all

To prick this prating fellow from our way.

MAFFIO (*drawing his sword*)

Ay! that will I.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

LORD JUSTICE

ACT IV.

Count Maffio, have a care,
And you, sir. (To JEPPO.)
The first man who draws his sword
Upon the meanest officer of this Court,
Dies before nightfall.

DUCHESS

Sirs, put up your swords :
It is most meet that I should hear this man.
(Goes back to throne.)

MORANZONE

Now hast thou got thy enemy in thy hand.

LORD JUSTICE (*taking the time-glass up*)
Guido Ferranti, while the crumbling sand
Falls through this time-glass, thou hast leave
to speak.
This and no more.

GUIDO

It is enough, my lord.

LORD JUSTICE

Thou standest on the extreme verge of death ;

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT IV. See that thou speakest nothing but the truth,
Naught else will serve thee.

GUIDO

If I speak it not,
Then give my body to the headsman there.

LORD JUSTICE (*turns the time-glass*)

Let there be silence while the prisoner speaks.

TIPSTAFF

Silence in the Court there.

GUIDO

My Lords Justices.
And reverent judges of this worthy court,
I hardly know where to begin my tale,
So strangely dreadful is this history.
First, let me tell you of what birth I am.
I am the son of that good Duke Lorenzo
Who was with damned treachery done to
death
By a most wicked villain, lately Duke
Of this good town of Padua.

LORD JUSTICE

Have a care,
It will avail thee nought to mock this prince
Who now lies in his coffin.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

MAFFIO

ACT IV.

By Saint James,
This is the Duke of Parma's rightful heir.

JEPPO

I always thought him noble.

GUIDO

I confess
That with the purport of a just revenge,
A most just vengeance on a man of blood,
I entered the Duke's household, served his
will,

Sat at his board, drank of his wine, and was
His intimate : so much I will confess,
And this too, that I waited till he grew
To give the fondest secrets of his life
Into my keeping, till he fawned on me,
And trusted me in every private matter
Even as my noble father trusted him ;
That for this thing I waited.

(*To the Headsman.*)
Thou man of blood !

Turn not thine axe on me before the time :
Who knows if it be time for me to die ?
Is there no other neck in court but mine ?

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT IV. LORD JUSTICE

The sand within the time-glass flows apace.
Come quickly to the murder of the Duke.

GUIDO

I will be brief: Last night at twelve o' the
clock,

By a strong rope I scaled the palace wall,
With purport to revenge my father's murder—
Ay! with that purport I confess, my lord.
This much I will acknowledge, and this also,
That as with stealthy feet I climbed the stair
Which led unto the chamber of the Duke,
And reached my hand out for the scarlet cloth
Which shook and shivered in the gusty door,
Lo! the white moon that sailed in the great
heaven

Flooded with silver light the darkened room,
Night lit her candles for me, and I saw
The man I hated, cursing in his sleep,
And thinking of a most dear father murdered,
Sold to the scaffold, bartered to the block,
I smote the treacherous villain to the heart
With this same dagger, which by chance I
found

Within the chamber.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

DUCHESS (*rising from her seat*)

ACT IV.

Oh!

GUIDO (*hurriedly*)

I killed the Duke.

Now, my Lord Justice, if I may crave a boon,
Suffer me not to see another sun
Light up the misery of this loathsome world.

LORD JUSTICE

Thy boon is granted, thou shalt die to-night.
Lead him away: Come, Madam.

(GUIDO is led off; as he goes the DUCHESS
stretches out her arms and rushes down
the stage.)

DUCHESS

Guido! Guido!
(*Faints.*)

Tableau

END OF ACT IV.

A C T V

ACT V

SCENE

A dungeon in the public prison of Padua ; Guido lies asleep on a pallet (L.C.) ; a table with a goblet on it is set (L.C.) ; five soldiers are drinking and playing dice in the corner on a stone table ; one of them has a lantern hung to his halbert ; a torch is set in the wall over Guido's head. Two grated windows behind, one on each side of the door which is (C.), look out into a passage ; the stage is rather dark.

FIRST SOLDIER (*throws dice*)

Sixes again ! good Pietro.

SECOND SOLDIER

I' faith, lieutenant, I will play with thee no more. I will lose everything.

THIRD SOLDIER

Except thy wits ; thou art safe there !

SECOND SOLDIER

Ay, ay, he cannot take them from me.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT V. THIRD SOLDIER

No; for thou hast no wits to give him.

THE SOLDIERS (*loudly*)

Ha! ha! ha!

FIRST SOLDIER

Silence! You will wake the prisoner; he is asleep.

SECOND SOLDIER

What matter? He will get sleep enough when he is buried. I warrant he'd be glad if we could wake him when he's in the grave.

THIRD SOLDIER

Nay! for when he wakes there it will be judgment day.

SECOND SOLDIER

Ay, and he has done a grievous thing; for, look you, to murder one of us who are but flesh and blood is a sin, and to kill a Duke goes being near against the law.

FIRST SOLDIER

Well, well, he was a wicked Duke.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

SECOND SOLDIER

ACT V

And so he should not have touched him ; if one meddles with wicked people, one is like to be tainted with their wickedness.

THIRD SOLDIER

Ay, that is true. How old is the prisoner ?

SECOND SOLDIER

Old enough to do wrong, and not old enough to be wise.

FIRST SOLDIER

Why, then, he might be any age.

SECOND SOLDIER

They say the Duchess wanted to pardon him.

FIRST SOLDIER

Is that so ?

SECOND SOLDIER

Ay, and did much entreat the Lord Justice, but he would not.

FIRST SOLDIER

I had thought, Pietro, that the Duchess was omnipotent.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT V. SECOND SOLDIER

True, she is well-favoured ; I know none so comely.

THE SOLDIERS

Ha ! ha ! ha !

FIRST SOLDIER

I meant I had thought our Duchess could do anything.

SECOND SOLDIER

Nay, for he is now given over to the Justices, and they will see that justice be done ; they and stout Hugh the headsman ; but when his head is off, why then the Duchess can pardon him if she like ; there is no law against that.

FIRST SOLDIER

[I do not think that stout Hugh, as you call him, will do the business for him after all. This Guido is of gentle birth, and so by the law can drink poison first, if it so be his pleasure.]

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

THIRD SOLDIER

ACT V.

[Faith, to drink poison is a poor pleasure.]

SECOND SOLDIER

[What kind of poison is it ?]

FIRST SOLDIER

[Why, of the kind that kills.]

SECOND SOLDIER

[What sort of a thing is poison ?]

FIRST SOLDIER

[It is a drink, like water, only not so healthy: if you would taste it there is some in the cup there.]

SECOND SOLDIER

[By Saint James, if it be not healthy, I will have none of it !]

THIRD SOLDIER

[And if he does not drink it ?]

FIRST SOLDIER

[Why, then, they will kill him.]

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT V. THIRD SOLDIER

[And if he does drink it?]

FIRST SOLDIER

[Why, then, he will die.]

SECOND SOLDIER

[He has a grave choice to make. I trust
he will choose wisely.]

(Knocking comes at the door.)

FIRST SOLDIER

See who that is.

(*Third Soldier goes over and looks through
the wicket.*)

THIRD SOLDIER

It is a woman, sir.

FIRST SOLDIER

Is she pretty ?

THIRD SOLDIER

I can't tell. She is masked, lieutenant.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

FIRST SOLDIER

ACT V.

It is only very ugly or very beautiful women
who ever hide their faces. Let her in.

*(Soldier opens the door, and the DUCHESS
masked and cloaked enters.)*

DUCHESS *(to Third Soldier)*

Are you the officer on guard ?

FIRST SOLDIER *(coming forward)*

I am, madam.

DUCHESS

I must see the prisoner alone.

FIRST SOLDIER

I am afraid that is impossible. *(The DUCHESS
hands him a ring, he looks at and returns it to
her with a bow and makes a sign to the Soldiers.)*
Stand without there. *(Exeunt the Soldiers.)*

DUCHESS

Officer, your men are somewhat rough.

FIRST SOLDIER

They mean no harm.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT V. DUCHESS

I will be going back in a few minutes. As I pass through the corridor do not let them try and lift my mask.

FIRST SOLDIER

You need not be afraid, madam.

DUCHESS

I have a particular reason for wishing my face not to be seen.

FIRST SOLDIER

Madam, with this ring you can go in and out as you please; it is the Duchess's own ring.

DUCHESS

Leave us. (*The Soldier turns to go out.*)
A moment, sir. For what hour is . . .

FIRST SOLDIER

At twelve o'clock, madam, we have orders to lead him out; but I dare say he won't wait for us; he's more like to take a drink out of that poison yonder. Men are afraid of the headsman.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

DUCHESS

ACT V.

Is that poison ?

FIRST SOLDIER

Ay, madam, and very sure poison too.

DUCHESS

You may go, sir.

FIRST SOLDIER

By Saint James, a pretty hand ! I wonder
who she is. Some woman who loved him,
perhaps. *(Exit.)*

DUCHESS (*taking her mask off*)

At last !

He can escape now in this cloak and vizard,
We are of a height almost : they will not
know him ;

As for myself what matter ?

So that he does not curse me as he goes,
I care but little : I wonder will he curse me,
He has the right. It is eleven now,
They will not come till twelve. [What will
they say

When they find the bird has flown ?]

(Goes over to the table.)

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT V.

So this is poison.

Is it not strange that in this liquor here
There lies the key to all philosophies ?

(*Takes the cup up.*)

It smells of poppies. I remember well
That, when I was a child in Sicily,
I took the scarlet poppies from the corn,
And made a little wreath, and my grave uncle,
Don John of Naples, laughed : I did not know
That they had power to stay the springs of
life,

To make the pulse cease beating, and to chill
The blood in its own vessels, till men come
And with a hook hale the poor body out,
And throw it in a ditch : the body, ay,—
What of the soul ? that goes to heaven or
hell.

Where will mine go ?

(*Takes the torch from the wall, and goes over
to the bed.*)

How peacefully here he sleeps,
Like a young schoolboy tired out with play :
I would that I could sleep so peacefully,
But I have dreams. (Bending over him.)

Poor boy : what if I kissed him ?
No, no, my lips would burn him like a fire.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

He has had enough of Love. Still that white ACT V.
neck

Will 'scape the headsman : I have seen to that:
He will get hence from Padua to-night,
And that is well. You are very wise, Lord
Justices,

And yet you are not half so wise as I am,
And that is well.

O God ! how I have loved you,
And what a bloody flower did Love bear !

(Comes back to the table.)

What if I drank these juices, and so ceased ?
Were it not better than to wait till Death
Come to my bed with all his serving men,
Remorse, disease, old age, and misery ?
I wonder does one suffer much : I think
That I am very young to die like this,
But so it must be. Why, why should I
die ?

He will escape to-night, and so his blood
Will not be on my head. No, I must die ;
I have been guilty, therefore I must die
He loves me not, and therefore I must die :
I would die happier if he would kiss me,
But he will not do that. I did not know
him,

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT V. I thought he meant to sell me to the Judge ;
That is not strange ; we women never know
Our lovers till they leave us.

(Bell begins to toll.)

Thou vile bell,

That like a bloodhound from thy brazen
throat
Call'st for this man's life, cease ! thou shalt not
get it.

He stirs—I must be quick : *(Takes up cup.)*
O Love, Love, Love,

I did not think that I would pledge thee thus !

*(Drinks poison, and sets the cup down on the
table behind her: the noise wakens GUIDO,
who starts up, and does not see what she
has done. There is silence for a minute,
each looking at the other.)*

I do not come to ask your pardon now,
Seeing I know I stand beyond all pardon,
A very guilty, very wicked woman ;
Enough of that : I have already, sir,
Confessed my sin to the Lords Justices ;
They would not listen to me : and some said
I did invent a tale to save your life,
You having trafficked with me ; others said
That women played with pity as with men ;

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

Others that grief for my slain Lord and ACT V.
husband

Had robbed me of my wits: they would not
hear me,

And, when I sware it on the holy book,
They bade the doctor cure me. They are ten,
Ten against one, and they possess your life.

They call me Duchess here in Padua.

I do not know, sir; if I be the Duchess,
I wrote your pardon, and they would not take
it;

They call it treason, say I taught them that;
Maybe I did. Within an hour, Guido,
They will be here, and drag you from the cell,
And bind your hands behind your back, and
bid you

Kneel at the block: I am before them there;
Here is the signet ring of Padua,
'Twill bring you safely through the men on
guard,

There is my cloak and vizard; they have
orders

Not to be curious: when you pass the gate
Turn to the left, and at the second bridge
You will find horses waiting: by to-morrow
You will be at Venice, safe. (*A pause.*)

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT V

Do you not speak?

Will you not even curse me ere you go?—

You have the right.

(*A pause.*)

You do not understand

There lies between you and the headsman's
axe

Hardly so much sand in the hour-glass

As a child's palm could carry: here is the ring.

I have washed my hand: there is no blood
upon it:

You need not fear. Will you not take the
ring?

GUIDO (*takes ring and kisses it*)

Ay! gladly, Madam.

DUCHESS

And leave Padua.

GUIDO

Leave Padua.

DUCHESS

But it must be to-night.

GUIDO

To-night it shall be.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

DUCHESS

ACT V.

Oh, thank God for that!

GUIDO

So I can live ; life never seemed so sweet
As at this moment.

DUCHESS

Do not tarry, Guido,
There is my cloak : the horse is at the bridge,
The second bridge below the ferry house :
Why do you tarry ? Can your ears not hear
This dreadful bell, whose every ringing stroke
Robs one brief minute from your boyish life.
Go quickly.

GUIDO

Ay ! he will come soon enough.

DUCHESS

Who ?

GUIDO (*calmly*)

Why, the headsman.

DUCHESS

No, no.

GUIDO

Only he
Can bring me out of Padua.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT V. DUCHESS

You dare not !

You dare not burden my o'erburdened soul
With two dead men ! I think one is enough.
For when I stand before God, face to face,
I would not have you, with a scarlet thread
Around your white throat, coming up behind
To say I did it : [Why, the very devils
Who howl away in hell would pity me ;
You will not be more cruel than the devils
Who are shut out from God.]

GUIDO

Madam, I wait.

DUCHESS

No, no, you cannot : you do not understand,
[I have less power in Padua to-night
Than any common woman ; they will kill you.]
I saw the scaffold as I crossed the square,
[Already the low rabble throng about it
With fearful jests, and horrid merriment,
As though it were a morris-dancer's platform,
And not Death's sable throne.] O Guido,
Guido,
You must escape !

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

GUIDO

ACT V.

[Ay, by the hand of death,
Not by your hand.]

DUCHESS

[Oh, you are merciless,
Merciless now as ever : No, no, Guido,
You must go hence.]

GUIDO

Madam, I tarry here.

DUCHESS

Guido, you shall not : it would be a thing
So terrible that the amazed stars
Would fall from heaven, and the palsied moon
Be in her sphere eclipsed, and the great sun
Refuse to shine upon the unjust earth
Which saw thee die.

GUIDO

Be sure I shall not stir.

DUCHESS (*wringing her hands*)

[You do not know : once that the judges come
I have no power to keep you from the axe ;
You cannot wait : have I not sinned enough ?]
Is one sin not enough, but must it breed
A second sin more horrible again

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT V. Than was the one that bare it ? O God, God,
Seal up sin's teeming womb, and make it
barren,
I will not have more blood upon my hand
Than I have now.

GUIDO (*seizing her hand*)

What ! am I fallen so low
That I may not have leave to die for you ?

DUCHESS (*tearing her hand away*)

Die for me ?—no, my life is a vile thing,
Thrown to the miry highways of this world ;
You shall not die for me, you shall not, Guido,
I am a guilty woman.

GUIDO

Guilty ?—let those
Who know what a thing temptation is,
Let those who have not walked as we have
done,
In the red fire of passion, those whose lives
Are dull and colourless, in a word let those,
If any such there be, who have not loved,
Cast stones against you. As for me.

DUCHESS

Alas !

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

GUIDO (*falling at her feet*)

ACT V

You are my lady, and you are my love !
O hair of gold, O crimson lips, O face
Made for the luring and the love of man !
Incarnate image of pure loveliness !
Worshipping thee I do forget the past,
Worshipping thee my soul comes close to
thine,
Worshipping thee I seem to be a god,
And though they give my body to the block,
Yet is my love eternal !

(DUCHESS *puts her hands over her face* :
GUIDO *draws them down*.)

Sweet, lift up

The trailing curtains that overhang thine
eyes

That I may look into those eyes, and tell you
I love you, never more than now when Death
Thrusts his cold lips between us : Beatrice,
I love you : have you no word left to say ?
Oh, I can bear the executioner,
But not this silence : will you not say you
love me ?

Speak but that word and Death shall lose his
sting,

But speak it not, and fifty thousand deaths

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT V. Are, in comparison, mercy. Oh you are cruel,
And do not love me.

DUCHESS

Alas ! I have no right.
For I have stained the innocent hands of love
With spilt-out blood : there is blood on the
ground,
I set it there.

GUIDO

Sweet, it was not yourself,
It was some devil tempted you.

DUCHESS (*rising suddenly*)

No, no,
We are each our own devil, and we make
This world our hell.

GUIDO

Then let high Paradise
Fall into Tartarus ! for I shall make
This world my heaven for a little space.
[I love you, Beatrice.]

DUCHESS

[I am not worthy,
Being a thing of sin.]

GUIDO

No, my Lord Christ,

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

The sin was mine, if any sin there was.

ACT V.

'Twas I who nurtured murder in my heart,

Sweetened my meats, seasoned my wine with
it,

And in my fancy slew the accursed Duke
A hundred times a day. Why, had this man
Died half so often as I wished him to,
Death had been stalking ever through the
house,

And murder had not slept.

But you, fond heart,

Whose little eyes grew tender over a whipt
hound,

You whom the little children laughed to
see

Because you brought the sunlight where you
passed,

You the white angel of God's purity,

This which men call your sin, what was it?

DUCHESS

Ay!

What was it? There are times it seems a
dream,

An evil dream sent by an evil god,

And then I see the dead face in the coffin

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT V. And know it is no dream, but that my hand
Is red with blood, and that my desperate soul
Striving to find some haven for its love
From the wild tempest of this raging world,
Has wrecked its bark upon the rocks of sin.
What was it, said you?—murder merely?

Nothing

But murder, horrible murder.

GUIDO

Nay, nay, nay,

'Twas but the passion-flower of your love
That in one moment leapt to terrible life,
And in one moment bare this gory fruit,
Which I had plucked in thought a thousand
times.

My soul was murderous, but my hand refused;
Your hand wrought murder, but your soul
was pure.

And so I love you, Beatrice, and let him
Who has no mercy for your stricken head,
Lack mercy up in heaven! Kiss me, sweet.

(Tries to kiss her.)

DUCHESS

No, no, your lips are pure, and mine are
soiled,

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

For Guilt has been my paramour, and Sin
Lain in my bed : O Guido, if you love me
Get hence, for every moment is a worm
Which gnaws your life away : nay, sweet, get
hence,

ACT V.

And if in after time you think of me,
Think of me as of one who loved you more
Than anything on earth ; think of me, Guido,
As of a woman merely, one who tried
To make her life a sacrifice to love,
And slew love in the trial : Oh, what is
that ?

The bell has stopped from ringing, and I
hear
The feet of armed men upon the stair.

GUIDO (*aside*)

That is the signal for the guard to come.

DUCHESS

Why has the bell stopped ringing ?

GUIDO

If you must know,
That stops my life on this side of the grave,
But on the other we shall meet again.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT V. DUCHESS

No, no, 'tis not too late: you must get
hence;
The horse is by the bridge, there is still time.
Away, away, you must not tarry here!
(*Noise of Soldiers in the passage.*)

A VOICE OUTSIDE

Room for the Lord Justice of Padua!

(*The LORD JUSTICE is seen through the grated
window passing down the corridor pre-
ceded by men bearing torches.*)

DUCHESS

It is too late.

A VOICE OUTSIDE

Room for the headsman.

DUCHESS (*sinks down*)

Oh!

(*The Headsman with his axe on his shoulder
is seen passing the corridor, followed by
Monks bearing candles.*)

GUIDO

[Farewell, dear love, for I must drink this
poison.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

I do not fear the headsman, but I would die ACT V.
Not on the lonely scaffold.]

DUCHESS

[Oh!]

GUIDO

Here in thine arms, kissing thy mouth :
farewell !

[But here,

(Goes to the table and takes the goblet up.)
What, art thou empty ?

(Throws it to the ground.)

O thou churlish gaoler,
Even of poisons niggard !]

DUCHESS (*faintly*)

Blame him not.

GUIDO

O God ! you have not drunk it, Beatrice ?
Tell me you have not ?

DUCHESS

Were I to deny it,

There is a fire eating at my heart
Which would find utterance.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT V GUIDO

O treacherous love,
Why have you not left a drop for me ?

DUCHESS

No, no, it held but death enough for one.

GUIDO

Is there no poison still upon your lips,
That I may draw it from them ?

DUCHESS

Why should you die ?
You have not spilt blood, and so need not die :
I have spilt blood, and therefore I must die.
Was it not said blood should be spilt for
blood ?
Who said that ? I forget.

GUIDO

Tarry for me,
Our souls will go together.

DUCHESS

Nay, you must live.
There are many other women in the world

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

Who will love you, and not murder for your ACT V.
sake.

GUIDO

I love you only.

DUCHESS

You need not die for that.

GUIDO

Ah, if we die together, love, why then
Can we not lie together in one grave.

DUCHESS

A grave is but a narrow wedding-bed.

GUIDO

It is enough for us.

DUCHESS

And they will strew it
With a stark winding-sheet, and bitter herbs ;
I think there are no roses in the grave,
Or if there are, they all are withered now
Since my Lord went there.

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT V. GUIDO

Ah! dear Beatrice,
Your lips are roses that death cannot wither.

DUCHESS

Nay, if we lie together, will not my lips
Fall into dust, and your enamoured eyes
Shrivel to sightless sockets, and the worms,
Which are our groomsmen, eat away your
heart?

GUIDO

I do not care: Death has no power on love,
And so by Love's immortal sovereignty
I will die with you.

DUCHESS

But the grave is black,
And the pit black, so I must go before
To light the candles for your coming hither.
No, no, I will not die, I will not die.
Love, you are strong, and young, and very
brave,
Stand between me and the angel of death,
And wrestle with him for me.

*(Thrusts GUIDO in front of her with his back
to the audience.)*

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

I will kiss you, ACT V.

When you have thrown him. Oh, have you
no cordial,

To stay the workings of this poison in me?
Are there no rivers left in Italy
That you will not fetch me one cup of water
To quench this fire?

GUIDO

O God!

DUCHESS

You did not tell me
There was a drought in Italy, and no water,
Nothing but fire.

GUIDO

O Love!

DUCHESS

Send for a leech,
Not him who stanch'd my husband, but
another,
We have no time: send for a leech, I say:
There is an antidote against each poison,
And he will sell it if we give him money.
Tell him that I will give him Padua,

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT V. For one short hour of life: I will not die.
Oh, I am sick to death: no, do not touch me,
This poison gnaws my heart: I did not know
It was such pain to die: I thought that life
Had taken all the agonies to itself;
It seems it is not so.

GUIDO

O damnéd stars,
Quench your vile cresset-lights in tears, and
bid
The moon, your mistress, shine no more to-
night.

DUCHESS

Guido, why are we here? I think this room
Is poorly furnished for a marriage chamber.
Let us get hence at once. Where are the
horses?

We should be on our way to Venice now.
How cold the night is! We must ride faster.
[That is our wedding-bell, is it not, Guido?]

(*The Monks begin to chant outside.*)
Music! It should be merrier; but grief
Is of the fashion now—I know not why.
You must not weep: do we not love each
other?—

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

That is enough. Death, what do you here ? ACT V.
You were not bidden to this table, sir ;
Away, we have no need of you : I tell you
It was in wine I pledged you, not in poison.
They lied who told you that I drank your
poison.

It was spilt upon the ground, like my Lord's
blood ;
You came too late.

GUIDO

Sweet, there is nothing there :
These things are only unreal shadows.

DUCHESS

Death,

Why do you tarry, get to the upper chamber ;
The cold meats of my husband's funeral feast
Are set for you ; this is a wedding feast.
You are out of place, sir ; and, besides, 'tis
summer.

We do not need these heavy fires now,
You scorch us. [Guido, bid that grave-digger
Stop digging in the earth that empty grave.
I will not lie there.] Oh, I am burned up,
[Burned up and blasted by these fires within
me.]

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT V. Can you do nothing? Water, give me water,
Or else more poison. No: I feel no pain—
Is it not curious I should feel no pain?—
And Death has gone away, I am glad of
that.

I thought he meant to part us. Tell me, Guido,
Are you not sorry that you ever saw me?

GUIDO

I swear I would not have lived otherwise.
Why, in this dull and common world of ours
Men have died looking for such moments as
this
And have not found them.

DUCHESS

Then you are not sorry?
How strange that seems.

GUIDO

What, Beatrice, have I not
Stood face to face with beauty; that is enough
For one man's life. Why, love, I could be
merry;

I have been often sadder at a feast,
But who were sad at such a feast as this

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

When Love and Death are both our cup- ACT V.
bearers;
We love and die together.

DUCHESS

Oh, I have been
Guilty beyond all women, and indeed
Beyond all women punished. Do you think—
No, that could not be—Oh, do you think that
love

Can wipe the bloody stain from off my hands,
Pour balm into my wounds, heal up my hurts,
And wash my scarlet sins as white as snow?—
For I have sinned.

GUIDO

They do not sin at all
Who sin for love.

DUCHESS

No, I have sinned, and yet
Perchance my sin will be forgiven me.
I have loved much.

*(They kiss each other now for the first time
in this Act, when suddenly the DUCHESS
leaps up in the dreadful spasm of death,
tears in agony at her dress, and finally,*

THE DUCHESS OF PADUA

ACT V.

with face twisted and distorted with pain, falls back dead in a chair. GUIDO seizing her dagger from her belt, kills himself; and, as he falls across her knees, clutches at the cloak which is on the back of the chair, and throws it entirely over her. There is a little pause. Then down the passage comes the tramp of Soldiers; the door is opened, and the LORD JUSTICE, the Headsman, and the Guard enter and see this figure shrouded in black, and GUIDO lying dead across her. The LORD JUSTICE rushes forward and drags the cloak off the DUCHESS, whose face is now the marble image of peace, the sign of God's forgiveness.)

Tableau

CURTAIN



THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY

THE EARL OF CAVERSHAM, K.G.

VISCOUNT GORING, his Son

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN, BART., Under-Secretary for
Foreign Affairs

VICOMTE DE NANJAC, Attaché at the French
Embassy in London

MR. MONTFORD

MASON, Butler to Sir Robert Chiltern

PHIPPS, Lord Goring's Servant

JAMES }
HAROLD } Footmen

LADY CHILTERN

LADY MARKBY

THE COUNTESS OF BASILDON

MRS. MARCHMONT

MISS MABEL CHILTERN, Sir Robert Chiltern's Sister

MRS. CHEVELEY

THE SCENES OF THE PLAY

ACT I. *The Octagon Room in Sir Robert Chiltern's House in Grosvenor Square.*

ACT II. *Morning-room in Sir Robert Chiltern's House.*

ACT III. *The Library of Lord Goring's House in Curzon Street.*

ACT IV. *Same as Act II.*

TIME: *The Present.*

PLACE: *London.*

*The action of the play is completed within
twenty-four hours.*

FIRST ACT

SCENE

The octagon room at Sir Robert Chiltern's house in Grosvenor Square.

[The room is brilliantly lighted and full of guests. At the top of the staircase stands LADY CHILTERN, a woman of grave Greek beauty, about twenty-seven years of age. She receives the guests as they come up. Over the well of the staircase hangs a great chandelier with wax lights, which illumine a large eighteenth-century French tapestry—representing the Triumph of Love, from a design by Boucher—that is stretched on the staircase wall. On the right is the entrance to the music-room. The sound of a string quartette is faintly heard. The entrance on the left leads to other reception-rooms. MRS. MARCHMONT and LADY BASILDON, two very pretty women, are seated together on a Louis Seize sofa. They are types of exquisite

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT I. *fragility. Their affectation of manner has a delicate charm. Watteau would have loved to paint them.]*

MRS. MARCHMONT

Going on to the Hartlocks' to-night,
Margaret?

LADY BASILDON

I suppose so. Are you?

MRS. MARCHMONT

Yes. Horribly tedious parties they give,
don't they?

LADY BASILDON

Horribly tedious! Never know why I go.
Never know why I go anywhere.

MRS. MARCHMONT

I come here to be educated.

LADY BASILDON

Ah! I hate being educated!

MRS. MARCHMONT

So do I. It puts one almost on a level
with the commercial classes, doesn't it? But
dear Gertrude Chiltern is always telling me

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

that I should have some serious purpose in ACT I. life. So I come here to try to find one.

LADY BASILDON

[*Looking round through her lorgnette.*] I don't see anybody here to-night whom one could possibly call a serious purpose. The man who took me in to dinner talked to me about his wife the whole time.

MRS. MARCHMONT

How very trivial of him!

LADY BASILDON

Terribly trivial! What did your man talk about?

MRS. MARCHMONT

About myself.

LADY BASILDON

[*Languidly.*] And were you interested?

MRS. MARCHMONT

[*Shaking her head.*] Not in the smallest degree.

LADY BASILDON

What martyrs we are, dear Margaret!

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT I. MRS. MARCHMONT

[*Rising.*] And how well it becomes us, Olivia!

[*They rise and go towards the music-room. The VICOMTE DE NANJAC, a young attaché known for his neckties and his Anglomania, approaches with a low bow, and enters into conversation.*]]

MASON

[*Announcing guests from the top of the staircase.*] Mr. and Lady Jane Barford. Lord Caversham.

[*Enter LORD CAVERSHAM, an old gentleman of seventy, wearing the riband and star of the Garter. A fine Whig type. Rather like a portrait by Lawrence.*]]

LORD CAVERSHAM

Good evening, Lady Chiltern! Has my good-for-nothing young son been here?

LADY CHILTERN

[*Smiling.*] I don't think Lord Goring has arrived yet.

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

MABEL CHILTERN

ACT I.

[Coming up to LORD CAVERSHAM.] Why do you call Lord Goring good-for-nothing?

[MABEL CHILTERN is a perfect example of the English type of prettiness, the apple-blossom type. She has all the fragrance and freedom of a flower. There is ripple after ripple of sunlight in her hair, and the little mouth, with its parted lips, is expectant, like the mouth of a child. She has the fascinating tyranny of youth, and the astonishing courage of innocence. To sane people she is not reminiscent of any work of art. But she is really like a Tanagra statuette, and would be rather annoyed if she were told so.]

LORD CAVERSHAM

Because he leads such an idle life.

MABEL CHILTERN

How can you say such a thing? Why, he rides in the Row at ten o'clock in the morning, goes to the Opera three times a week, changes his clothes at least five times a day, and dines out every night of the season. You don't call that leading an idle life, do you?

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT I. LORD CAVERSHAM

[*Looking at her with a kindly twinkle in his eyes.*] You are a very charming young lady!

MABEL CHILTERN

How sweet of you to say that, Lord Caversham! Do come to us more often. You know we are always at home on Wednesdays, and you look so well with your star!

LORD CAVERSHAM

Never go anywhere now. Sick of London Society. Shouldn't mind being introduced to my own tailor; he always votes on the right side. But object strongly to being sent down to dinner with my wife's milliner. Never could stand Lady Caversham's bonnets.

MABEL CHILTERN

Oh, I love London Society! I think it has immensely improved. It is entirely composed now of beautiful idiots and brilliant lunatics. Just what Society should be.

LORD CAVERSHAM

Hum! Which is Goring? Beautiful idiot, or the other thing?

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

MABEL CHILTERN

ACT I

[*Gravely.*] I have been obliged for the present to put Lord Goring into a class quite by himself. But he is developing charmingly!

LORD CAVERSHAM

Into what?

MABEL CHILTERN

[*With a little curtsey.*] I hope to let you know very soon, Lord Caversham!

MASON

[*Announcing guests.*] Lady Markby. Mrs. Cheveley.

[Enter LADY MARKBY and MRS. CHEVELEY. LADY MARKBY is a pleasant, kindly, popular woman, with gray hair à la marquise and good lace. MRS. CHEVELEY, who accompanies her, is tall and rather slight. Lips very thin and highly-coloured, a line of scarlet on a pallid face. Venetian red hair, aquiline nose, and long throat. Rouge accentuates the natural paleness of her complexion. Gray-green eyes that move restlessly. She is in heliotrope, with diamonds. She looks rather like an orchid, and

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT I. *makes great demands on one's curiosity. In all her movements she is extremely graceful. A work of art, on the whole, but showing the influence of too many schools.]*

LADY MARKBY

Good evening, dear Gertrude! So kind of you to let me bring my friend, Mrs. Cheveley. Two such charming women should know each other!

LADY CHILTERN

[*Advances towards MRS. CHEVELEY with a sweet smile. Then suddenly stops, and bows rather distantly.*] I think Mrs. Cheveley and I have met before. I did not know she had married a second time.

LADY MARKBY

[*Genially.*] Ah, nowadays people marry as often as they can, don't they? It is most fashionable. [To DUCHESS OF MARYBOROUGH.] Dear Duchess, and how is the Duke? Brain still weak, I suppose? Well, that is only to be expected, is it not? His good father was just the same. There is nothing like race, is there?

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

MRS. CHEVELEY

ACT I.

[*Playing with her fan.*] But have we really met before, Lady Chiltern? I can't remember where. I have been out of England for so long.

LADY CHILTERN

We were at school together, Mrs. Cheveley.

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*Superciliously.*] Indeed? I have forgotten all about my schooldays. I have a vague impression that they were detestable.

LADY CHILTERN

[*Coldly.*] I am not surprised!

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*In her sweetest manner.*] Do you know, I am quite looking forward to meeting your clever husband, Lady Chiltern. Since he has been at the Foreign Office, he has been so much talked of in Vienna. They actually succeed in spelling his name right in the newspapers. That in itself is fame, on the continent.

LADY CHILTERN

I hardly think there will be much in

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT I. common between you and my husband, Mrs. Cheveley! [Moves away.]

VICOMTE DE NANJAC

Ah! chère Madame, quelle surprise! I have not seen you since Berlin!

MRS. CHEVELEY

Not since Berlin, Vicomte. Five years ago!

VICOMTE DE NANJAC

And you are younger and more beautiful than ever. How do you manage it?

MRS. CHEVELEY

By making it a rule only to talk to perfectly charming people like yourself.

VICOMTE DE NANJAC

Ah! you flatter me. You butter me, as they say here.

MRS. CHEVELEY

Do they say that here? How dreadful of them!

VICOMTE DE NANJAC

Yes, they have a wonderful language. It should be more widely known.

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

[SIR ROBERT CHILTERN enters. *A man of ACT I.* forty, but looking somewhat younger. Clean-shaven, with finely-cut features, dark-haired and dark-eyed. *A personality of mark.* Not popular—few personalities are. But intensely admired by the few, and deeply respected by the many. *The note of his manner is that of perfect distinction, with a slight touch of pride.* One feels that he is conscious of the success he has made in life. *A nervous temperament, with a tired look.* The firmly-chiselled mouth and chin contrast strikingly with the romantic expression in the deep-set eyes. The variance is suggestive of an almost complete separation of passion and intellect, as though thought and emotion were each isolated in its own sphere through some violence of will-power. There is nervousness in the nostrils, and in the pale, thin, pointed hands. It would be inaccurate to call him picturesque. Picturesqueness cannot survive the House of Commons. But *Vandyck would have liked to have painted his head.*]

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Good evening, Lady Markby ! I hope you have brought Sir John with you ?

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT I. LADY MARKBY

Oh ! I have brought a much more charming person than Sir John. Sir John's temper since he has taken seriously to politics has become quite unbearable. Really, now that the House of Commons is trying to become useful, it does a great deal of harm.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

I hope not, Lady Markby. At any rate we do our best to waste the public time, don't we ? But who is this charming person you have been kind enough to bring to us ?

LADY MARKBY

Her name is Mrs. Cheveley ! One of the Dorsetshire Cheveleys, I suppose. But I really don't know. Families are so mixed nowadays. Indeed, as a rule, everybody turns out to be somebody else.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Mrs. Cheveley ? I seem to know the name.

LADY MARKBY

She has just arrived from Vienna.

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

ACT I.

Ah! yes. I think I know whom you mean.

LADY MARKBY

Oh! she goes everywhere there, and has such pleasant scandals about all her friends. I really must go to Vienna next winter. I hope there is a good chef at the Embassy.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

If there is not, the Ambassador will certainly have to be recalled. Pray point out Mrs. Cheveley to me. I should like to see her.

LADY MARKBY

Let me introduce you. [*To MRS. CHEVELEY.*] My dear, Sir Robert Chiltern is dying to know you!

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Bowing.*] Every one is dying to know the brilliant Mrs. Cheveley. Our attachés at Vienna write to us about nothing else.

MRS. CHEVELEY

Thank you, Sir Robert. An acquaintance that begins with a compliment is sure to develop into a real friendship. It starts in

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT I. the right manner. And I find that I know Lady Chiltern already.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Really?

MRS. CHEVELEY

Yes. She has just reminded me that we were at school together. I remember it perfectly now. She always got the good conduct prize. I have a distinct recollection of Lady Chiltern always getting the good conduct prize!

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Smiling.*] And what prizes did you get, Mrs. Cheveley?

MRS. CHEVELEY

My prizes came a little later on in life. I don't think any of them were for good conduct. I forget!

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

I am sure they were for something charming!

MRS. CHEVELEY

I don't know that women are always re-

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

warded for being charming. I think they are ACT I. usually punished for it! Certainly, more women grow old nowadays through the faithfulness of their admirers than through anything else! At least that is the only way I can account for the terribly haggard look of most of your pretty women in London!

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

What an appalling philosophy that sounds! To attempt to classify you, Mrs. Cheveley, would be an impertinence. But may I ask, at heart, are you an optimist or a pessimist? Those seem to be the only two fashionable religions left to us nowadays.

MRS. CHEVELEY

Oh, I'm neither. Optimism begins in a broad grin, and Pessimism ends with blue spectacles. Besides, they are both of them merely poses.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

You prefer to be natural?

MRS. CHEVELEY

Sometimes. But it is such a very difficult pose to keep up.

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT I. SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

What would those modern psychological novelists, of whom we hear so much, say to such a theory as that?

MRS. CHEVELEY

Ah! the strength of women comes from the fact that psychology cannot explain us. Men can be analysed, women . . . merely adored.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

You think science cannot grapple with the problem of women?

MRS. CHEVELEY

Science can never grapple with the irrational. That is why it has no future before it, in this world.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

And women represent the irrational.

MRS. CHEVELEY

Well-dressed women do.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[With a polite bow.] I fear I could hardly agree with you there. But do sit down.

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

And now tell me, what makes you leave your ACT I. brilliant Vienna for our gloomy London—or perhaps the question is indiscreet?

MRS. CHEVELEY

Questions are never indiscreet. Answers sometimes are.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Well, at any rate, may I know if it is politics or pleasure?

MRS. CHEVELEY

Politics are my only pleasure. You see nowadays it is not fashionable to flirt till one is forty, or to be romantic till one is forty-five, so we poor women who are under thirty, or say we are, have nothing open to us but politics or philanthropy. And philanthropy seems to me to have become simply the refuge of people who wish to annoy their fellow-creatures. I prefer politics. I think they are more . . . becoming!

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

A political life is a noble career!

MRS. CHEVELEY

Sometimes. And sometimes it is a clever

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT I. game, Sir Robert. And sometimes it is a great nuisance.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Which do you find it?

MRS. CHEVELEY

I? A combination of all three. [Drops her fan.]

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[Picks up fan.] Allow me!

MRS. CHEVELEY

Thanks.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

But you have not told me yet what makes you honour London so suddenly. Our season is almost over.

MRS. CHEVELEY

Oh! I don't care about the London season! It is too matrimonial. People are either hunting for husbands, or hiding from them. I wanted to meet you. It is quite true. You know what a woman's curiosity is. Almost as great as a man's! I wanted immensely to meet you, and . . . to ask you to do something for me.

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

ACT I.

I hope it is not a little thing, Mrs. Cheveley. I find that little things are so very difficult to do.

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*After a moment's reflection.*] No, I don't think it is quite a little thing.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

I am so glad. Do tell me what it is.

MRS. CHEVELEY

Later on. [*Rises.*] And now may I walk through your beautiful house? I hear your pictures are charming. Poor Baron Arnheim —you remember the Baron?—used to tell me you had some wonderful Corots.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*With an almost imperceptible start.*] Did you know Baron Arnheim well?

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*Smiling.*] Intimately. Did you?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

At one time.

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT I. MRS. CHEVELEY

Wonderful man, wasn't he ?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*After a pause.*] He was very remarkable, in many ways.

MRS. CHEVELEY

I often think it such a pity he never wrote his memoirs. They would have been most interesting.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Yes : he knew men and cities well, like the old Greek.

MRS. CHEVELEY

Without the dreadful disadvantage of having a Penelope waiting at home for him.

MASON

Lord Goring.

[Enter LORD GORING. *Thirty-four, but always says he is younger. A well-bred, expressionless face. He is clever, but would not like to be thought so. A flawless dandy, he would be annoyed if he were considered romantic. He plays with life, and is on perfectly good terms*

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

with the world. He is fond of being misunderstood. It gives him a post of vantage.] ACT I.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Good evening, my dear Arthur! Mrs. Cheveley, allow me to introduce to you Lord Goring, the idlest man in London.

MRS. CHEVELEY

I have met Lord Goring before.

LORD GORING

[*Bowing.*] I did not think you would remember me, Mrs. Cheveley.

MRS. CHEVELEY

My memory is under admirable control. And are you still a bachelor?

LORD GORING

I . . . believe so.

MRS. CHEVELEY

How very romantic!

LORD GORING

Oh! I am not at all romantic. I am not old enough. I leave romance to my seniors.

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT I. SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Lord Goring is the result of Boodle's Club,
Mrs. Cheveley.

MRS. CHEVELEY

He reflects every credit on the institution.

LORD GORING

May I ask are you staying in London long?

MRS. CHEVELEY

That depends partly on the weather, partly on the cooking, and partly on Sir Robert.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

You are not going to plunge us into a European war, I hope?

MRS. CHEVELEY

There is no danger, at present!

[*She nods to LORD GORING, with a look of amusement in her eyes, and goes out with SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. LORD GORING saunters over to MABEL CHILTERN.*]

MABEL CHILTERN

You are very late!

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

LORD GORING

ACT I.

Have you missed me?

MABEL CHILTERN

Awfully!

LORD GORING

Then I am sorry I did not stay away longer. I like being missed.

MABEL CHILTERN

How very selfish of you!

LORD GORING

I am very selfish.

MABEL CHILTERN

You are always telling me of your bad qualities, Lord Goring.

LORD GORING

I have only told you half of them as yet, Miss Mabel!

MABEL CHILTERN

Are the others very bad?

LORD GORING

Quite dreadful! When I think of them at night I go to sleep at once.

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT I. MABEL CHILTERN

Well, I delight in your bad qualities. I wouldn't have you part with one of them.

LORD GORING

How very nice of you! But then you are always nice. By the way, I want to ask you a question, Miss Mabel. Who brought Mrs. Cheveley here? That woman in heliotrope, who has just gone out of the room with your brother?

MABEL CHILTERN

Oh, I think Lady Markby brought her. Why do you ask?

LORD GORING

I haven't seen her for years, that is all.

MABEL CHILTERN

What an absurd reason!

LORD GORING

All reasons are absurd.

MABEL CHILTERN

What sort of woman is she?

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

LORD GORING

ACT I.

Oh! a genius in the daytime and a beauty at night!

MABEL CHILTERN

I dislike her already.

LORD GORING

That shows your admirable good taste.

VICOMTE DE NANJAC

[Approaching.] Ah, the English young lady is the dragon of good taste, is she not? Quite the dragon of good taste.

LORD GORING

So the newspapers are always telling us.

VICOMTE DE NANJAC

I read all your English newspapers. I find them so amusing.

LORD GORING

Then, my dear Nanjac, you must certainly read between the lines.

VICOMTE DE NANJAC

I should like to, but my professor objects.
[To MABEL CHILTERN.] May I have the

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT I. pleasure of escorting you to the music-room, Mademoiselle ?

MABEL CHILTERN

[*Looking very disappointed.*] Delighted, Vicomte, quite delighted ! [Turning to **LORD GORING.**] Aren't you coming to the music-room ?

LORD GORING

Not if there is any music going on, Miss Mabel.

MABEL CHILTERN

[*Severely.*] The music is in German. You would not understand it.

[*Goes out with the VICOMTE DE NANJAC.*
LORD CAVERSHAM comes up to his son.]

LORD CAVERSHAM

Well, sir ! what are you doing here ? Wasting your life as usual ! You should be in bed, sir. You keep too late hours ! I heard of you the other night at Lady Rufford's dancing till four o'clock in the morning !

LORD GORING

Only a quarter to four, father.

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

LORD CAVERSHAM

ACT I.

Can't make out how you stand London Society. The thing has gone to the dogs, a lot of damned nobodies talking about nothing.

LORD GORING

I love talking about nothing, father. It is the only thing I know anything about.

LORD CAVERSHAM

You seem to me to be living entirely for pleasure.

LORD GORING

What else is there to live for, father? Nothing ages like happiness.

LORD CAVERSHAM

You are heartless, sir, very heartless!

LORD GORING

I hope not, father. Good evening, Lady Basildon!

LADY BASILDON

[Arching two pretty eyebrows.] Are you here? I had no idea you ever came to political parties!

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT I. LORD GORING

I adore political parties. They are the only place left to us where people don't talk politics.

LADY BASILDON

I delight in talking politics. I talk them all day long. But I can't bear listening to them. I don't know how the unfortunate men in the House stand these long debates.

LORD GORING

By never listening.

LADY BASILDON

Really?

LORD GORING

[*In his most serious manner.*] Of course. You see, it is a very dangerous thing to listen. If one listens one may be convinced; and a man who allows himself to be convinced by an argument is a thoroughly unreasonable person.

LADY BASILDON

Ah! that accounts for so much in men that I have never understood, and so much in women that their husbands never appreciate in them!

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

MRS. MARCHMONT

ACT I.

[*With a sigh.*] Our husbands never appreciate anything in us. We have to go to others for that!

LADY BASILDON

[*Emphatically.*] Yes, always to others, have we not?

LORD GORING

[*Smiling.*] And those are the views of the two ladies who are known to have the most admirable husbands in London.

MRS. MARCHMONT

That is exactly what we can't stand. My Reginald is quite hopelessly faultless. He is really unendurably so, at times! There is not the smallest element of excitement in knowing him.

LORD GORING

How terrible! Really, the thing should be more widely known!

LADY BASILDON

Basildon is quite as bad; he is as domestic as if he was a bachelor.

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT I. MRS. MARCHMONT

[*Pressing LADY BASILDON's hand.*] My poor Olivia! We have married perfect husbands, and we are well punished for it.

LORD GORING

I should have thought it was the husbands who were punished.

MRS. MARCHMONT

[*Drawing herself up.*] Oh, dear no! They are as happy as possible! And as for trusting us, it is tragic how much they trust us.

LADY BASILDON

Perfectly tragic!

LORD GORING

Or comic, Lady Basildon?

LADY BASILDON

Certainly not comic, Lord Goring. How unkind of you to suggest such a thing!

MRS. MARCHMONT

I am afraid Lord Goring is in the camp of the enemy, as usual. I saw him talking to that Mrs. Cheveley when he came in.

LORD GORING

Handsome woman, Mrs. Cheveley!

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

LADY BASILDON

ACT I.

[*Stiffly.*] Please don't praise other women in our presence. You might wait for us to do that!

LORD GORING

I did wait.

MRS. MARCHMONT

Well, we are not going to praise her. I hear she went to the Opera on Monday night, and told Tommy Rufford at supper that, as far as she could see, London Society was entirely made up of dowdies and dandies.

LORD GORING

She is quite right, too. The men are all dowdies and the women are all dandies, aren't they?

MRS. MARCHMONT

[*After a pause.*] Oh! do you really think that is what Mrs. Cheveley meant?

LORD GORING

Of course. And a very sensible remark for Mrs. Cheveley to make, too.

[*Enter MABEL CHILTERN. She joins the group.*]

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT I. MABEL CHILTERN

Why are you talking about Mrs. Cheveley? Everybody is talking about Mrs. Cheveley! Lord Goring says—what did you say, Lord Goring, about Mrs. Cheveley? Oh! I remember, that she was a genius in the daytime and a beauty at night.

LADY BASILDON

What a horrid combination! So very unnatural!

MRS. MARCHMONT

[*In her most dreamy manner.*] I like looking at geniuses, and listening to beautiful people.

LORD GORING

Ah! that is morbid of you, Mrs. Marchmont!

MRS. MARCHMONT

[*Brightening to a look of real pleasure.*] I am so glad to hear you say that. Marchmont and I have been married for seven years, and he has never once told me that I was morbid. Men are so painfully unobservant!

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

LADY BASILDON

ACT I.

[*Turning to her.*] I have always said, dear Margaret, that you were the most morbid person in London.

MRS. MARCHMONT

Ah! but you are always sympathetic, Olivia!

MABEL CHILTERN

Is it morbid to have a desire for food? I have a great desire for food. Lord Goring, will you give me some supper?

LORD GORING

With pleasure, Miss Mabel. [*Moves away with her.*]

MABEL CHILTERN

How horrid you have been! You have never talked to me the whole evening!

LORD GORING

How could I? You went away with the child-diplomatist.

MABEL CHILTERN

You might have followed us. Pursuit

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT I. would have been only polite. I don't think I like you at all this evening!

LORD GORING

I like you immensely.

MABEL CHILTERN

Well, I wish you'd show it in a more marked way! [They go downstairs.]

MRS. MARCHMONT

Olivia, I have a curious feeling of absolute faintness. I think I should like some supper very much. I know I should like some supper.

LADY BASILDON

I am positively dying for supper, Margaret!

MRS. MARCHMONT

Men are so horribly selfish, they never think of these things.

LADY BASILDON

Men are grossly material, grossly material!

[The VICOMTE DE NANJAC enters from the music-room with some other guests. After having carefully examined all the people present, he approaches LADY BASILDON.]

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

VICOMTE DE NANJAC

ACT I.

May I have the honour of taking you down to supper, Comtesse ?

LADY BASILDON

[*Coldly.*] I never take supper, thank you, Vicomte. [*The VICOMTE is about to retire.* LADY BASILDON, *seeing this, rises at once and takes his arm.*] But I will come down with you with pleasure.

VICOMTE DE NANJAC

I am so fond of eating ! I am very English in all my tastes.

LADY BASILDON

You look quite English, Vicomte, quite English.

[*They pass out.* MR. MONTFORD, *a perfectly groomed young dandy, approaches MRS. MARCHMONT.*]

MR. MONTFORD

Like some supper, Mrs. Marchmont ?

MRS. MARCHMONT

[*Languidly.*] Thank you, Mr. Montford, I never touch supper. [*Rises hastily and*

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT I. *takes his arm.*] But I will sit beside you, and watch you.

MR. MONTFORD

I don't know that I like being watched when I am eating!

MRS. MARCHMONT

Then I will watch some one else.

MR. MONTFORD

I don't know that I should like that either.

MRS. MARCHMONT

[*Severely.*] Pray, Mr. Montford, do not make these painful scenes of jealousy in public!

[*They go downstairs with the other guests, passing SIR ROBERT CHILTERN and MRS. CHEVELEY, who now enter.*]

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

And are you going to any of our country houses before you leave England, Mrs. Cheveley?

MRS. CHEVELEY

Oh, no! I can't stand your English house-parties. In England people actually try to be

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

brilliant at breakfast. That is so dreadful of ACT ! them ! Only dull people are brilliant at breakfast. And then the family skeleton is always reading family prayers. My stay in England really depends on you, Sir Robert. [Sits down on the sofa.]

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[Taking a seat beside her.] Seriously ?

MRS. CHEVELEY

Quite seriously. I want to talk to you about a great political and financial scheme, about this Argentine Canal Company, in fact.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

What a tedious, practical subject for you to talk about, Mrs. Cheveley !

MRS. CHEVELEY

Oh, I like tedious, practical subjects. What I don't like are tedious, practical people. There is a wide difference. Besides, you are interested, I know, in International Canal schemes. You were Lord Radley's secretary, weren't you, when the Government bought the Suez Canal shares ?

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT I. SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Yes. But the Suez Canal was a very great and splendid undertaking. It gave us our direct route to India. It had imperial value. It was necessary that we should have control. This Argentine scheme is a commonplace Stock Exchange swindle.

MRS. CHEVELEY

A speculation, Sir Robert! A brilliant, daring speculation.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Believe me, Mrs. Cheveley, it is a swindle. Let us call things by their proper names. It makes matters simpler. We have all the information about it at the Foreign Office. In fact, I sent out a special Commission to inquire into the matter privately, and they report that the works are hardly begun, and as for the money already subscribed, no one seems to know what has become of it. The whole thing is a second Panama, and with not a quarter of the chance of success that miserable affair ever had. I hope you have not invested in it. I am sure you are far too clever to have done that.

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

MRS. CHEVELEY

ACT I.

I have invested very largely in it.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Who could have advised you to do such
a foolish thing?

MRS. CHEVELEY

Your old friend—and mine.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Who?

MRS. CHEVELEY

Baron Arnheim.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Frowning.*] Ah! yes. I remember hearing,
at the time of his death, that he had
been mixed up in the whole affair.

MRS. CHEVELEY

It was his last romance. His last but one,
to do him justice.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Rising.*] But you have not seen my
Corots yet. They are in the music-room.
Corots seem to go with music, don't they?
May I show them to you?

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT I. MRS. CHEVELEY

[*Shaking her head.*] I am not in a mood to-night for silver twilights, or rose-pink dawns. I want to talk business. [*Motions to him with her fan to sit down again beside her.*]

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

I fear I have no advice to give you, Mrs. Cheveley, except to interest yourself in something less dangerous. The success of the Canal depends, of course, on the attitude of England, and I am going to lay the report of the Commissioners before the House to-morrow night.

MRS. CHEVELEY

That you must not do. In your own interests, Sir Robert, to say nothing of mine, you must not do that.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Looking at her in wonder.*] In my own interests? My dear Mrs. Cheveley, what do you mean? [*Sits down beside her.*]

MRS. CHEVELEY

Sir Robert, I will be quite frank with you. I want you to withdraw the report that you

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

had intended to lay before the House, on the ACT ! ground that you have reasons to believe that the Commissioners have been prejudiced or misinformed, or something. Then I want you to say a few words to the effect that the Government is going to reconsider the question, and that you have reason to believe that the Canal, if completed, will be of great international value. You know the sort of things ministers say in cases of this kind. A few ordinary platitudes will do. In modern life nothing produces such an effect as a good platitude. It makes the whole world kin. Will you do that for me ?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Mrs. Cheveley, you cannot be serious in making me such a proposition !

MRS. CHEVELEY

I am quite serious.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Coldly.*] Pray allow me to believe that you are not.

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*Speaking with great deliberation and em-*

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT I. *phasis.]* Ah ! but I am. And if you do what I ask you, I . . . will pay you very handsomely !

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Pay me !

MRS. CHEVELEY

Yes.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

I am afraid I don't quite understand what you mean.

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*Leaning back on the sofa and looking at him.*] How very disappointing ! And I have come all the way from Vienna in order that you should thoroughly understand me.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

I fear I don't.

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*In her most nonchalant manner.*] My dear Sir Robert, you are a man of the world, and you have your price, I suppose. Everybody has nowadays. The drawback is that most people are so dreadfully expensive. I know I

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

am. I hope you will be more reasonable in ACT I.
your terms.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Rises indignantly.*] If you will allow me,
I will call your carriage for you. You have
lived so long abroad, Mrs. Cheveley, that you
seem to be unable to realise that you are
talking to an English gentleman.

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*Detains him by touching his arm with her
fan, and keeping it there while she is talking.*] I
realise that I am talking to a man who laid
the foundation of his fortune by selling to a
Stock Exchange speculator a Cabinet secret.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Biting his lip.*] What do you mean?

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*Rising and facing him.*] I mean that I
know the real origin of your wealth and your
career, and I have got your letter, too.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

What letter?

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT I. MRS. CHEVELEY

[*Contemptuously.*] The letter you wrote to Baron Arnheim, when you were Lord Radley's secretary, telling the Baron to buy Suez Canal shares—a letter written three days before the Government announced its own purchase.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Hoarsely.*] It is not true.

MRS. CHEVELEY

You thought that letter had been destroyed. How foolish of you! It is in my possession.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

The affair to which you allude was no more than a speculation. The House of Commons had not yet passed the bill; it might have been rejected.

MRS. CHEVELEY

It was a swindle, Sir Robert. Let us call things by their proper names. It makes everything simpler. And now I am going to sell you that letter, and the price I ask for it is your public support of the Argentine

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

scheme. You made your own fortune out of ACT I. one canal. You must help me and my friends to make our fortunes out of another!

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

It is infamous, what you propose—in-
famous!

MRS. CHEVELEY

Oh, no! This is the game of life as we all
have to play it, Sir Robert, sooner or later!

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

I cannot do what you ask me.

MRS. CHEVELEY

You mean you cannot help doing it. You
know you are standing on the edge of a
precipice. And it is not for you to make
terms. It is for you to accept them. Sup-
posing you refuse—

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

What then?

MRS. CHEVELEY

My dear Sir Robert, what then? You are
ruined, that is all! Remember to what a
point your Puritanism in England has brought

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT I. you. In old days nobody pretended to be a bit better than his neighbours. In fact, to be a bit better than one's neighbour was considered excessively vulgar and middle-class. Nowadays, with our modern mania for morality, every one has to pose as a paragon of purity, incorruptibility, and all the other seven deadly virtues—and what is the result? You all go over like ninepins—one after the other. Not a year passes in England without somebody disappearing. Scandals used to lend charm, or at least interest, to a man—now they crush him. And yours is a very nasty scandal. You couldn't survive it. If it were known that as a young man, secretary to a great and important minister, you sold a Cabinet secret for a large sum of money, and that that was the origin of your wealth and career, you would be hounded out of public life, you would disappear completely. And after all, Sir Robert, why should you sacrifice your entire future rather than deal diplomatically with your enemy? For the moment I am your enemy. I admit it! And I am much stronger than you are. The big battalions are on my side. You have a splendid

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

position, but it is your splendid position that ACT I makes you so vulnerable. You can't defend it! And I am in attack. Of course I have not talked morality to you. You must admit in fairness that I have spared you that. Years ago you did a clever, unscrupulous thing; it turned out a great success. You owe to it your fortune and position. And now you have got to pay for it. Sooner or later we all have to pay for what we do. You have to pay now. Before I leave you to-night, you have got to promise me to suppress your report, and to speak in the House in favour of this scheme.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

What you ask is impossible.

MRS. CHEVELEY

You must make it possible. You are going to make it possible. Sir Robert, you know what your English newspapers are like. Suppose that when I leave this house I drive down to some newspaper office, and give them this scandal and the proofs of it! Think of their loathsome joy, of the delight they would have in dragging you down, of the mud and

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT I. mire they would plunge you in. Think of the hypocrite with his greasy smile penning his leading article, and arranging the foulness of the public placard.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Stop! You want me to withdraw the report and to make a short speech stating that I believe there are possibilities in the scheme?

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*Sitting down on the sofa.*] Those are my terms.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*In a low voice.*] I will give you any sum of money you want.

MRS. CHEVELEY

Even you are not rich enough, Sir Robert, to buy back your past. No man is.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

I will not do what you ask me. I will not.

MRS. CHEVELEY

You have to. If you don't . . . [*Rises from the sofa.*]

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

ACT I.

[*Bewildered and unnerved.*] Wait a moment! What did you propose? You said that you would give me back my letter, didn't you?

MRS. CHEVELEY

Yes. That is agreed. I will be in the Ladies' Gallery to-morrow night at half-past eleven. If by that time—and you will have had heaps of opportunity—you have made an announcement to the House in the terms I wish, I shall hand you back your letter with the prettiest thanks, and the best, or at any rate the most suitable, compliment I can think of. I intend to play quite fairly with you. One should always play fairly . . . when one has the winning cards. The Baron taught me that . . . amongst other things.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

You must let me have time to consider your proposal.

MRS. CHEVELEY

No; you must settle now!

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT I. SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Give me a week—three days!

MRS. CHEVELEY

Impossible! I have got to telegraph to Vienna to-night.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

My God! what brought you into my life?

MRS. CHEVELEY

Circumstances. [*Moves towards the door.*]

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Don't go. I consent. The report shall be withdrawn. I will arrange for a question to be put to me on the subject.

MRS. CHEVELEY

Thank you. I knew we should come to an amicable agreement. I understood your nature from the first. I analysed you, though you did not adore me. And now you can get my carriage for me, Sir Robert. I see the people coming up from supper, and Englishmen always get romantic after a meal, and that bores me dreadfully.

[*Exit SIR ROBERT CHILTERN.*]

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

[Enter Guests, LADY CHILTERN, LADY ACT I.
MARKBY, LORD CAVERSHAM, LADY BASILDON,
MRS. MARCHMONT, VICOMTE DE NANJAC, MR.
MONTFORD.]

LADY MARKBY

Well, dear Mrs. Cheveley, I hope you have enjoyed yourself. Sir Robert is very entertaining, is he not ?

MRS. CHEVELEY

Most entertaining ! I have enjoyed my talk with him immensely.

LADY MARKBY

He has had a very interesting and brilliant career. And he has married a most admirable wife. Lady Chiltern is a woman of the very highest principles, I am glad to say. I am a little too old now, myself, to trouble about setting a good example, but I always admire people who do. And Lady Chiltern has a very ennobling effect on life, though her dinner-parties are rather dull sometimes. But one can't have everything, can one ? And now I must go, dear. Shall I call for you to-morrow ?

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT I. MRS. CHEVELEY

Thanks.

LADY MARKBY

We might drive in the Park at five.
Everything looks so fresh in the Park now!

MRS. CHEVELEY

Except the people!

LADY MARKBY

Perhaps the people are a little jaded. I have often observed that the Season as it goes on produces a kind of softening of the brain. However, I think anything is better than high intellectual pressure. That is the most unbecoming thing there is. It makes the noses of the young girls so particularly large. And there is nothing so difficult to marry as a large nose, men don't like them. Good-night, dear! [To LADY CHILTERN.] Good-night, Gertrude! [Goes out on LORD CAVERSHAM'S arm.]

MRS. CHEVELEY

What a charming house you have, Lady Chiltern! I have spent a delightful evening.

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

It has been so interesting getting to know ACT I
your husband.

LADY CHILTERN

Why did you wish to meet my husband,
Mrs. Cheveley?

MRS. CHEVELEY

Oh, I will tell you. I wanted to interest
him in this Argentine Canal scheme, of which
I dare say you have heard. And I found him
most susceptible,—susceptible to reason, I
mean. A rare thing in a man. I converted
him in ten minutes. He is going to make
a speech in the House to-morrow night in
favour of the idea. We must go to the
Ladies' Gallery and hear him! It will be a
great occasion!

LADY CHILTERN

There must be some mistake. That scheme
could never have my husband's support.

MRS. CHEVELEY

Oh, I assure you it's all settled. I don't
regret my tedious journey from Vienna now.
It has been a great success. But, of course,

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT I. for the next twenty-four hours the whole thing is a dead secret.

LADY CHILTERN

[*Gently.*] A secret? Between whom?

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*With a flash of amusement in her eyes.*] Between your husband and myself.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Entering.*] Your carriage is here, Mrs. Cheveley!

MRS. CHEVELEY

Thanks! Good evening, Lady Chiltern! Good-night, Lord Goring! I am at Claridge's. Don't you think you might leave a card?

LORD GORING

If you wish it, Mrs. Cheveley!

MRS. CHEVELEY

Oh, don't be so solemn about it, or I shall be obliged to leave a card on you. In England I suppose that would be hardly considered *en règle*. Abroad, we are more civilised. Will you see me down, Sir Robert?

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

Now that we have both the same interests at ACT I.
heart we shall be great friends, I hope!

[*Sails out on SIR ROBERT CHILTERN'S arm.*
LADY CHILTERN goes to the top of the staircase
and looks down at them as they descend. Her
expression is troubled. After a little time she
is joined by some of the guests, and passes with
them into another reception-room.]

MABEL CHILTERN

What a horrid woman!

LORD GORING

You should go to bed, Miss Mabel.

MABEL CHILTERN

Lord Goring!

LORD GORING

My father told me to go to bed an hour ago. I don't see why I shouldn't give you the same advice. I always pass on good advice. It is the only thing to do with it. It is never of any use to oneself.

MABEL CHILTERN

Lord Goring, you are always ordering me out of the room. I think it most courageous of you. Especially as I am not going to bed

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT I. for hours. [*Goes over to the sofa.*] You can come and sit down if you like, and talk about anything in the world, except the Royal Academy, Mrs. Cheveley, or novels in Scotch dialect. They are not improving subjects. [*Catches sight of something that is lying on the sofa half hidden by the cushion.*] What is this? Some one has dropped a diamond brooch! Quite beautiful, isn't it? [*Shows it to him.*] I wish it was mine, but Gertrude won't let me wear anything but pearls, and I am thoroughly sick of pearls. They make one look so plain, so good and so intellectual. I wonder whom the brooch belongs to.

LORD GORING

I wonder who dropped it.

MABEL CHILTERN

It is a beautiful brooch.

LORD GORING

It is a handsome bracelet.

MABEL CHILTERN

It isn't a bracelet. It's a brooch.

LORD GORING

It can be used as a bracelet. [*Takes it*

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

*from her, and, pulling out a green letter-case, ACT I.
puts the ornament carefully in it, and replaces
the whole thing in his breast-pocket with the
most perfect sangfroid.]*

MABEL CHILTERN

What are you doing?

LORD GORING

Miss Mabel, I am going to make a rather
strange request to you.

MABEL CHILTERN

[*Eagerly.*] Oh, pray do! I have been
waiting for it all the evening.

LORD GORING

[*Is a little taken aback, but recovers himself.*] Don't mention to anybody that I have taken
charge of this brooch. Should any one write
and claim it, let me know at once.

MABEL CHILTERN

That is a strange request.

LORD GORING

Well, you see I gave this brooch to some-
body once, years ago.

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT I. MABEL CHILTERN

You did?

LORD GORING

Yes.

[LADY CHILTERN enters alone. *The other guests have gone.*]

MABEL CHILTERN

Then I shall certainly bid you good-night.
Good-night, Gertrude! [Exit.]

LADY CHILTERN

Good-night, dear! [To LORD GORING.]
You saw whom Lady Markby brought here
to-night?

LORD GORING

Yes. It was an unpleasant surprise. What
did she come here for?

LADY CHILTERN

Apparently to try and lure Robert to up-
hold some fraudulent scheme in which she is
interested. The Argentine Canal, in fact.

LORD GORING

She has mistaken her man, hasn't she?

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

LADY CHILTERN

ACT I.

She is incapable of understanding an upright nature like my husband's!

LORD GORING

Yes. I should fancy she came to grief if she tried to get Robert into her toils. It is extraordinary what astounding mistakes clever women make.

LADY CHILTERN

I don't call women of that kind clever. I call them stupid!

LORD GORING

Same thing often. Good-night, Lady Chiltern!

LADY CHILTERN

Good-night!

[Enter SIR ROBERT CHILTERN.]

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

My dear Arthur, you are not going? Do stop a little!

LORD GORING

Afraid I can't, thanks. I have promised to look in at the Hartlocks'. I believe they have

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT I. got a mauve Hungarian band that plays mauve Hungarian music. See you soon.
Good-bye!

[*Exit.*]

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

How beautiful you look to-night, Gertrude!

LADY CHILTERN

Robert, it is not true, is it? You are not going to lend your support to this Argentine speculation? You couldn't!

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Starting.*] Who told you I intended to do so?

LADY CHILTERN

That woman who has just gone out, Mrs. Cheveley, as she calls herself now. She seemed to taunt me with it. Robert, I know this woman. You don't. We were at school together. She was untruthful, dishonest, an evil influence on every one whose trust or friendship she could win. I hated, I despised her. She stole things, she was a thief. She was sent away for being a thief. Why do you let her influence you?

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

ACT I.

Gertrude, what you tell me may be true, but it happened many years ago. It is best forgotten! Mrs. Cheveley may have changed since then. No one should be entirely judged by their past.

LADY CHILTERN

[*Sadly.*] One's past is what one is. It is the only way by which people should be judged.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

That is a hard saying, Gertrude!

LADY CHILTERN

It is a true saying, Robert. And what did she mean by boasting that she had got you to lend your support, your name, to a thing I have heard you describe as the most dishonest and fraudulent scheme there has ever been in political life?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Biting his lip.*] I was mistaken in the view I took. We all may make mistakes.

LADY CHILTERN

But you told me yesterday that you had

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT I. received the report from the Commission, and that it entirely condemned the whole thing.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Walking up and down.*] I have reasons now to believe that the Commission was prejudiced, or, at any rate, misinformed. Besides, Gertrude, public and private life are different things. They have different laws, and move on different lines.

LADY CHILTERN

They should both represent man at his highest. I see no difference between them.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Stopping.*] In the present case, on a matter of practical politics, I have changed my mind. That is all.

LADY CHILTERN

All!

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Sternly.*] Yes!

LADY CHILTERN

Robert! Oh! it is horrible that I should

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

have to ask you such a question—Robert, are ACT I.
you telling me the whole truth ?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Why do you ask me such a question ?

LADY CHILTERN

[*After a pause.*] Why do you not answer
it ?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Sitting down.*] Gertrude, truth is a very complex thing, and politics is a very complex business. There are wheels within wheels. One may be under certain obligations to people that one must pay. Sooner or later in political life one has to compromise. Every one does.

LADY CHILTERN

Compromise ? Robert, why do you talk so differently to-night from the way I have always heard you talk ? Why are you changed ?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

I am not changed. But circumstances alter things.

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT I. LADY CHILTERN

Circumstances should never alter principles !

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

But if I told you—

LADY CHILTERN

What ?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

That it was necessary, vitally necessary ?

LADY CHILTERN

It can never be necessary to do what is not honourable. Or if it be necessary, then what is it that I have loved ! But it is not, Robert ; tell me it is not. Why should it be ? What gain would you get ? Money ? We have no need of that ! And money that comes from a tainted source is a degradation. Power ? But power is nothing in itself. It is power to do good that is fine—that, and that only. What is it, then ? Robert, tell me why you are going to do this dishonourable thing !

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Gertrude, you have no right to use that

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

word. I told you it was a question of rational ACT I compromise. It is no more than that.

LADY CHILTERN

Robert, that is all very well for other men, for men who treat life simply as a sordid speculation ; but not for you, Robert, not for you. You are different. All your life you have stood apart from others. You have never let the world soil you. To the world, as to myself, you have been an ideal always. Oh ! be that ideal still. That great inheritance throw not away—that tower of ivory do not destroy. Robert, men can love what is beneath them—things unworthy, stained, dis-honoured. We women worship when we love ; and when we lose our worship, we lose everything. Oh ! don't kill my love for you, don't kill that !

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Gertrude !

LADY CHILTERN

I know that there are men with horrible secrets in their lives—men who have done some shameful thing, and who in some critical moment have to pay for it, by doing some

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT I. other act of shame—oh! don't tell me you are such as they are! Robert, is there in your life any secret dishonour or disgrace? Tell me, tell me at once, that—

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

That what?

LADY CHILTERN

[Speaking *very slowly.*] That our lives may drift apart.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Drift apart?

LADY CHILTERN

That they may be entirely separate. It would be better for us both.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Gertrude, there is nothing in my past life that you might not know.

LADY CHILTERN

I was sure of it, Robert, I was sure of it. But why did you say those dreadful things, things so unlike your real self? Don't let us ever talk about the subject again. You will write, won't you, to Mrs. Cheveley, and tell her that you cannot support this scandal-

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ous scheme of hers ? If you have given her ACT I any promise you must take it back, that is all !

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Must I write and tell her that ?

LADY CHILTERN

Surely, Robert ! What else is there to do ?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

I might see her personally. It would be better.

LADY CHILTERN

You must never see her again, Robert. She is not a woman you should ever speak to. She is not worthy to talk to a man like you. No ; you must write to her at once, now, this moment, and let your letter show her that your decision is quite irrevocable !

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Write this moment !

LADY CHILTERN

Yes.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

But it is so late. It is close on twelve.

LADY CHILTERN

That makes no matter. She must know at

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT I. once that she has been mistaken in you—and that you are not a man to do anything base or underhand or dishonourable. Write here, Robert. Write that you decline to support this scheme of hers, as you hold it to be a dishonest scheme. Yes—write the word dishonest. She knows what that word means. [SIR ROBERT CHILTERN *sits down and writes a letter. His wife takes it up and reads it.*] Yes; that will do. [Rings bell.] And now the envelope. [He writes the envelope slowly. Enter MASON.] Have this letter sent at once to Claridge's Hotel. There is no answer. [Exit MASON. LADY CHILTERN *kneels down beside her husband and puts her arms around him.*] Robert, love gives one an instinct to things. I feel to-night that I have saved you from something that might have been a danger to you, from something that might have made men honour you less than they do. I don't think you realise sufficiently, Robert, that you have brought into the political life of our time a nobler atmosphere, a finer attitude towards life, a freer air of purer aims and higher ideals—I know it, and for that I love you, Robert.

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

ACT I.

Oh, love me always, Gertrude, love me always !

LADY CHILTERN

I will love you always, because you will always be worthy of love. We needs must love the highest when we see it! [Kisses him and rises and goes out.]

[SIR ROBERT CHILTERN walks up and down for a moment; then sits down and buries his face in his hands. The Servant enters and begins putting out the lights. SIR ROBERT CHILTERN looks up.]

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Put out the lights, Mason, put out the lights!

[The Servant puts out the lights. The room becomes almost dark. The only light there is comes from the great chandelier that hangs over the staircase and illumines the tapestry of the Triumph of Love.]

ACT DROP

SECOND ACT

SECOND ACT

SCENE

Morning-room at Sir Robert Chiltern's house.

[LORD GORING, dressed in the height of fashion, is lounging in an armchair. SIR ROBERT CHILTERN is standing in front of the fireplace. He is evidently in a state of great mental excitement and distress. As the scene progresses he paces nervously up and down the room.]

LORD GORING

My dear Robert, it's a very awkward business, very awkward indeed. You should have told your wife the whole thing. Secrets from other people's wives are a necessary luxury in modern life. So, at least, I am always told at the club by people who are bald enough to know better. But no man should have a secret from his own wife. She invariably finds it out. Women have a wonderful instinct about

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT II. things. They can discover everything except the obvious.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Arthur, I couldn't tell my wife. When could I have told her? Not last night. It would have made a life-long separation between us, and I would have lost the love of the one woman in the world I worship, of the only woman who has ever stirred love within me. Last night it would have been quite impossible. She would have turned from me in horror . . . in horror and in contempt.

LORD GORING

Is Lady Chiltern as perfect as all that?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Yes; my wife is as perfect as all that.

LORD GORING

[*Taking off his left-hand glove.*] What a pity! I beg your pardon, my dear fellow, I didn't quite mean that. But if what you tell me is true, I should like to have a serious talk about life with Lady Chiltern.

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

ACT II.

It would be quite useless.

LORD GORING

May I try ?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Yes ; but nothing could make her alter her views.

LORD GORING

Well, at the worst it would simply be a psychological experiment.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

All such experiments are terribly dangerous.

LORD GORING

Everything is dangerous, my dear fellow. If it wasn't so, life wouldn't be worth living. . . . Well, I am bound to say that I think you should have told her years ago.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

When ? When we were engaged ? Do you think she would have married me if she had known that the origin of my fortune is such as it is, the basis of my career such as it is, and that I had done a thing that I suppose most men would call shameful and dishonourable ?

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT II. LORD GORING

[*Slowly.*] Yes; most men would call it ugly names. There is no doubt of that.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Bitterly.*] Men who every day do something of the same kind themselves. Men who, each one of them, have worse secrets in their own lives.

LORD GORING

That is the reason they are so pleased to find out other people's secrets. It distracts public attention from their own.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

And, after all, whom did I wrong by what I did? No one.

LORD GORING

[*Looking at him steadily.*] Except yourself, Robert.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*After a pause.*] Of course I had private information about a certain transaction contemplated by the Government of the day, and I acted on it. Private information is practically the source of every large modern fortune.

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

LORD GORING

ACT II.

[*Tapping his boot with his cane.*] And public scandal invariably the result.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Pacing up and down the room.*] Arthur, do you think that what I did nearly eighteen years ago should be brought up against me now? Do you think it fair that a man's whole career should be ruined for a fault done in one's boyhood almost. I was twenty-two at the time, and I had the double misfortune of being well-born and poor, two unforgiveable things nowadays. Is it fair that the folly, the sin of one's youth, if men choose to call it a sin, should wreck a life like mine, should place me in the pillory, should shatter all that I have worked for, all that I have built up? Is it fair, Arthur?

LORD GORING

Life is never fair, Robert. And perhaps it is a good thing for most of us that it is not.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Every man of ambition has to fight his century with its own weapons. What this century worships is wealth. The God of this

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT II. century is wealth. To succeed one must have wealth. At all costs one must have wealth.

LORD GORING

You underrate yourself, Robert. Believe me, without wealth you could have succeeded just as well.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

When I was old, perhaps. When I had lost my passion for power, or could not use it. When I was tired, worn out, disappointed. I wanted my success when I was young. Youth is the time for success. I couldn't wait.

LORD GORING

Well, you certainly have had your success while you are still young. No one in our day has had such a brilliant success. Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs at the age of forty—that's good enough for any one, I should think.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

And if it is all taken away from me now?
If I lose everything over a horrible scandal?
If I am hounded from public life?

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

LORD GORING

ACT II.

Robert, how could you have sold yourself for money ?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Excitedly.*] I did not sell myself for money. I bought success at a great price. That is all.

LORD GORING

[*Gravely.*] Yes ; you certainly paid a great price for it. But what first made you think of doing such a thing ?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Baron Arnheim.

LORD GORING

Damned scoundrel !

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

No ; he was a man of a most subtle and refined intellect. A man of culture, charm, and distinction. One of the most intellectual men I ever met.

LORD GORING

Ah ! I prefer a gentlemanly fool any day. There is more to be said for stupidity than

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT II. people imagine. Personally I have a great admiration for stupidity. It is a sort of fellow-feeling, I suppose. But how did he do it? Tell me the whole thing.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Throws himself into an armchair by the writing-table.*] One night after dinner at Lord Radley's the Baron began talking about success in modern life as something that one could reduce to an absolutely definite science. With that wonderfully fascinating quiet voice of his he expounded to us the most terrible of all philosophies, the philosophy of power, preached to us the most marvellous of all gospels, the gospel of gold. I think he saw the effect he had produced on me, for some days afterwards he wrote and asked me to come and see him. He was living then in Park Lane, in the house Lord Woolcomb has now. I remember so well how, with a strange smile on his pale, curved lips, he led me through his wonderful picture gallery, showed me his tapestries, his enamels, his jewels, his carved ivories, made me wonder at the strange loveliness of the luxury in which he lived;

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

and then told me that luxury was nothing but ACT II. a background, a painted scene in a play, and that power, power over other men, power over the world, was the one thing worth having, the one supreme pleasure worth knowing, the one joy one never tired of, and that in our century only the rich possessed it.

LORD GORING

[*With great deliberation.*] A thoroughly shallow creed.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Rising.*] I didn't think so then. I don't think so now. Wealth has given me enormous power. It gave me at the very outset of my life freedom, and freedom is everything. You have never been poor, and never known what ambition is. You cannot understand what a wonderful chance the Baron gave me. Such a chance as few men get.

LORD GORING

Fortunately for them, if one is to judge by results. But tell me definitely, how did the Baron finally persuade you to—well, to do what you did?

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT II. SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

When I was going away he said to me that if I ever could give him any private information of real value he would make me a very rich man. I was dazed at the prospect he held out to me, and my ambition and my desire for power were at that time boundless. Six weeks later certain private documents passed through my hands.

LORD GORING

[*Keeping his eyes steadily fixed on the carpet.*] State documents ?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Yes. [LORD GORING sighs, then passes his hand across his forehead and looks up.]

LORD GORING

I had no idea that you, of all men in the world, could have been so weak, Robert, as to yield to such a temptation as Baron Arnheim held out to you.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Weak? Oh, I am sick of hearing that phrase. Sick of using it about others. Weak? Do you really think, Arthur, that it is weak-

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ness that yields to temptation? I tell you ACT II that there are terrible temptations that it requires strength, strength and courage, to yield to. To stake all one's life on a single moment, to risk everything on one throw, whether the stake be power or pleasure, I care not—there is no weakness in that. There is a horrible, a terrible courage. I had that courage. I sat down the same afternoon and wrote Baron Arnheim the letter this woman now holds. He made three-quarters of a million over the transaction.

LORD GORING

And you?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

I received from the Baron £110,000.

LORD GORING

You were worth more, Robert.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

No; that money gave me exactly what I wanted, power over others. I went into the House immediately. The Baron advised me in finance from time to time. Before five years I had almost trebled my fortune. Since

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT II. then everything that I have touched has turned out a success. In all things connected with money I have had a luck so extraordinary that sometimes it has made me almost afraid. I remember having read somewhere, in some strange book, that when the gods wish to punish us they answer our prayers.

LORD GORING

But tell me, Robert, did you never suffer any regret for what you had done ?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

No. I felt that I had fought the century with its own weapons, and won.

LORD GORING

[*Sadly.*] You thought you had won.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

I thought so. [*After a long pause.*] Arthur, do you despise me for what I have told you ?

LORD GORING

[*With deep feeling in his voice.*] I am very sorry for you, Robert, very sorry indeed.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

I don't say that I suffered any remorse. I

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

didn't. Not remorse in the ordinary, rather ACT II. silly sense of the word. But I have paid conscience money many times. I had a wild hope that I might disarm destiny. The sum Baron Arnheim gave me I have distributed twice over in public charities since then.

LORD GORING

[*Looking up.*] In public charities? Dear me! what a lot of harm you must have done, Robert!

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Oh, don't say that, Arthur; don't talk like that!

LORD GORING

Never mind what I say, Robert! I am always saying what I shouldn't say. In fact, I usually say what I really think. A great mistake nowadays. It makes one so liable to be misunderstood. As regards this dreadful business, I will help you in whatever way I can. Of course you know that.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Thank you, Arthur, thank you. But what is to be done? What can be done?

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT II. LORD GORING

[*Leaning back with his hands in his pockets.*] Well, the English can't stand a man who is always saying he is in the right, but they are very fond of a man who admits that he has been in the wrong. It is one of the best things in them. However, in your case, Robert, a confession would not do. The money, if you will allow me to say so, is . . . awkward. Besides, if you did make a clean breast of the whole affair, you would never be able to talk morality again. And in England a man who can't talk morality twice a week to a large, popular, immoral audience is quite over as a serious politician. There would be nothing left for him as a profession except Botany or the Church. A confession would be of no use. It would ruin you.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

It would ruin me. Arthur, the only thing for me to do now is to fight the thing out.

LORD GORING

[*Rising from his chair.*] I was waiting for you to say that, Robert. It is the only thing

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

to do now. And you must begin by telling ACT II.
your wife the whole story.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

That I will not do.

LORD GORING

Robert, believe me, you are wrong.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

I couldn't do it. It would kill her love for me. And now about this woman, this Mrs. Cheveley. How can I defend myself against her? You knew her before, Arthur, apparently.

LORD GORING

Yes.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Did you know her well?

LORD GORING

[Arranging his necktie.] So little that I got engaged to be married to her once, when I was staying at the Tenbys'. The affair lasted for three days . . . nearly.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Why was it broken off?

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT II. LORD GORING

[*Airily.*] Oh, I forget. At least, it makes no matter. By the way, have you tried her with money? She used to be confoundedly fond of money.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

I offered her any sum she wanted. She refused.

LORD GORING

Then the marvellous gospel of gold breaks down sometimes. The rich can't do everything, after all.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Not everything. I suppose you are right. Arthur, I feel that public disgrace is in store for me. I feel certain of it. I never knew what terror was before. I know it now. It is as if a hand of ice were laid upon one's heart. It is as if one's heart were beating itself to death in some empty hollow.

LORD GORING

[*Striking the table.*] Robert, you must fight her. You must fight her.

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

ACT II.

But how ?

LORD GORING

I can't tell you how at present. I have not the smallest idea. But every one has some weak point. There is some flaw in each one of us. [*Strolls over to the fireplace and looks at himself in the glass.*] My father tells me that even I have faults. Perhaps I have. I don't know.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

In defending myself against Mrs. Cheveley, I have a right to use any weapon I can find, have I not ?

LORD GORING

[*Still looking in the glass.*] In your place I don't think I should have the smallest scruple in doing so. She is thoroughly well able to take care of herself.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Sits down at the table and takes a pen in his hand.*] Well, I shall send a cipher telegram to the Embassy at Vienna, to inquire if there is anything known against her. There may

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT II. be some secret scandal she might be afraid of.

LORD GORING

[*Settling his buttonhole.*] Oh, I should fancy Mrs. Cheveley is one of those very modern women of our time who find a new scandal as becoming as a new bonnet, and air them both in the Park every afternoon at five-thirty. I am sure she adores scandals, and that the sorrow of her life at present is that she can't manage to have enough of them.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Writing.*] Why do you say that?

LORD GORING

[*Turning round.*] Well, she wore far too much rouge last night, and not quite enough clothes. That is always a sign of despair in a woman.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Striking a bell.*] But it is worth while my wiring to Vienna, is it not?

LORD GORING

It is always worth while asking a question,

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

though it is not always worth while answering ACT II.
one.

[*Enter MASON.*]

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Is Mr. Trafford in his room ?

MASON

Yes, Sir Robert.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Puts what he has written into an envelope, which he then carefully closes.*] Tell him to have this sent off in cipher at once. There must not be a moment's delay.

MASON

Yes, Sir Robert.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Oh ! just give that back to me again.

[*Writes something on the envelope.* MASON then goes out with the letter.]

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

She must have had some curious hold over Baron Arnheim. I wonder what it was.

LORD GORING

[*Smiling.*] I wonder.

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT II. SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

I will fight her to the death, as long as my wife knows nothing.

LORD GORING

[*Strongly.*] Oh, fight in any case—in any case.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*With a gesture of despair.*] If my wife found out, there would be little left to fight for. Well, as soon as I hear from Vienna, I shall let you know the result. It is a chance, just a chance, but I believe in it. And as I fought the age with its own weapons, I will fight her with her weapons. It is only fair, and she looks like a woman with a past, doesn't she?

LORD GORING

Most pretty women do. But there is a fashion in pasts just as there is a fashion in frocks. Perhaps Mrs. Cheveley's past is merely a slightly *décolleté* one, and they are excessively popular nowadays. Besides, my dear Robert, I should not build too high hopes on frightening Mrs. Cheveley. I should

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

not fancy Mrs. Cheveley is a woman who ACT II. would be easily frightened. She has survived all her creditors, and she shows wonderful presence of mind.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Oh! I live on hopes now. I clutch at every chance. I feel like a man on a ship that is sinking. The water is round my feet, and the very air is bitter with storm. Hush! I hear my wife's voice.

[Enter LADY CHILTERN *in walking dress.*]

LADY CHILTERN

Good afternoon, Lord Goring!

LORD GORING

Good afternoon, Lady Chiltern! Have you been in the Park?

LADY CHILTERN

No; I have just come from the Woman's Liberal Association, where, by the way, Robert, your name was received with loud applause, and now I have come in to have my tea. [To LORD GORING.] You will wait and have some tea, won't you?

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT II. LORD GORING

I'll wait for a short time, thanks.

LADY CHILTERN

I will be back in a moment. I am only going to take my hat off.

LORD GORING

[*In his most earnest manner.*] Oh! please don't. It is so pretty. One of the prettiest hats I ever saw. I hope the Woman's Liberal Association received it with loud applause.

LADY CHILTERN

[*With a smile.*] We have much more important work to do than look at each other's bonnets, Lord Goring.

LORD GORING

Really? What sort of work?

LADY CHILTERN

Oh! dull, useful, delightful things, Factory Acts, Female Inspectors, the Eight Hours' Bill, the Parliamentary Franchise. . . . Everything, in fact, that you would find thoroughly uninteresting.

LORD GORING

And never bonnets?

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

LADY CHILTERN

ACT II.

[*With mock indignation.*] Never bonnets, never!

[*LADY CHILTERN goes out through the door leading to her boudoir.*]

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Takes LORD GORING's hand.*] You have been a good friend to me, Arthur, a thoroughly good friend.

LORD GORING

I don't know that I have been able to do much for you, Robert, as yet. In fact, I have not been able to do anything for you, as far as I can see. I am thoroughly disappointed with myself.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

You have enabled me to tell you the truth. That is something. The truth has always stifled me.

LORD GORING

Ah! the truth is a thing I get rid of as soon as possible! Bad habit, by the way. Makes one very unpopular at the club . . . with the older members. They call it being conceited. Perhaps it is.

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT II. SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

I would to God that I had been able to tell the truth . . . to live the truth. Ah! that is the great thing in life, to live the truth. [Sighs, and goes towards the door.] I'll see you soon again, Arthur, shan't I?

LORD GORING

Certainly. Whenever you like. I'm going to look in at the Bachelors' Ball to-night, unless I find something better to do. But I'll come round to-morrow morning. If you should want me to-night by any chance, send round a note to Curzon Street.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Thank you.

[As he reaches the door, LADY CHILTERN enters from her boudoir.]

LADY CHILTERN

You are not going, Robert?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

I have some letters to write, dear.

LADY CHILTERN

[Going to him.] You work too hard,

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

Robert. You seem never to think of yourself, and you are looking so tired. ACT II.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

It is nothing, dear, nothing.

[He kisses her and goes out.]

LADY CHILTERN

[To LORD GORING.] Do sit down. I am so glad you have called. I want to talk to you about . . . well, not about bonnets, or the Woman's Liberal Association. You take far too much interest in the first subject, and not nearly enough in the second.

LORD GORING

You want to talk to me about Mrs. Cheveley?

LADY CHILTERN

Yes. You have guessed it. After you left last night I found out that what she had said was really true. Of course I made Robert write her a letter at once, withdrawing his promise.

LORD GORING

So he gave me to understand.

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT II. LADY CHILTERN

To have kept it would have been the first stain on a career that has been stainless always. Robert must be above reproach. He is not like other men. He cannot afford to do what other men do. [*She looks at LORD GORING, who remains silent.*] Don't you agree with me? You are Robert's greatest friend. You are our greatest friend, Lord Goring. No one, except myself, knows Robert better than you do. He has no secrets from me, and I don't think he has any from you.

LORD GORING

He certainly has no secrets from me. At least I don't think so.

LADY CHILTERN

Then am I not right in my estimate of him? I know I am right. But speak to me frankly.

LORD GORING

[*Looking straight at her.*] Quite frankly?

LADY CHILTERN

Surely. You have nothing to conceal, have you?

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

LORD GORING

ACT II.

Nothing. But, my dear Lady Chiltern, I think, if you will allow me to say so, that in practical life—

LADY CHILTERN

[*Smiling.*] Of which you know so little, Lord Goring—

LORD GORING

Of which I know nothing by experience, though I know something by observation. I think that in practical life there is something about success, actual success, that is a little unscrupulous, something about ambition that is unscrupulous always. Once a man has set his heart and soul on getting to a certain point, if he has to climb the crag, he climbs the crag; if he has to walk in the mire—

LADY CHILTERN

Well?

LORD GORING

He walks in the mire. Of course I am only talking generally about life.

LADY CHILTERN

[*Gravely.*] I hope so. Why do you look at me so strangely, Lord Goring?

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT II. LORD GORING

Lady Chiltern, I have sometimes thought that . . . perhaps you are a little hard in some of your views on life. I think that . . . often you don't make sufficient allowances. In every nature there are elements of weakness, or worse than weakness. Supposing, for instance, that—that any public man, my father, or Lord Merton, or Robert, say, had, years ago, written some foolish letter to some one . . .

LADY CHILTERN

What do you mean by a foolish letter?

LORD GORING

A letter gravely compromising one's position. I am only putting an imaginary case.

LADY CHILTERN

Robert is as incapable of doing a foolish thing as he is of doing a wrong thing.

LORD GORING

[*After a long pause.*] Nobody is incapable of doing a foolish thing. Nobody is incapable of doing a wrong thing.

LADY CHILTERN

Are you a Pessimist? What will the other

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

dandies say? They will all have to go into ACT II.
mourning.

LORD GORING

[*Rising.*] No, Lady Chiltern, I am not a Pessimist. Indeed I am not sure that I quite know what Pessimism really means. All I do know is that life cannot be understood without much charity, cannot be lived without much charity. It is love, and not German philosophy, that is the true explanation of this world, whatever may be the explanation of the next. And if you are ever in trouble, Lady Chiltern, trust me absolutely, and I will help you in every way I can. If you ever want me, come to me for my assistance, and you shall have it. Come at once to me.

LADY CHILTERN

[*Looking at him in surprise.*] Lord Goring, you are talking quite seriously. I don't think I ever heard you talk seriously before.

LORD GORING

[*Laughing.*] You must excuse me, Lady Chiltern. It won't occur again, if I can help it.

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT II. LADY CHILTERN

But I like you to be serious.

[Enter MABEL CHILTERN, *in the most ravishing frock.*]

MABEL CHILTERN

Dear Gertrude, don't say such a dreadful thing to Lord Goring. Seriousness would be very unbecoming to him. Good afternoon, Lord Goring! Pray be as trivial as you can.

LORD GORING

I should like to, Miss Mabel, but I am afraid I am . . . a little out of practice this morning; and besides, I have to be going now.

MABEL CHILTERN

Just when I have come in! What dreadful manners you have! I am sure you were very badly brought up.

LORD GORING

I was.

MABEL CHILTERN

I wish I had brought you up!

LORD GORING

I am so sorry you didn't.

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

MABEL CHILTERN

ACT II.

It is too late now, I suppose ?

LORD GORING

[Smiling.] I am not so sure.

MABEL CHILTERN

Will you ride to-morrow morning ?

LORD GORING

Yes, at ten.

MABEL CHILTERN

Don't forget.

LORD GORING

Of course I shan't. By the way, Lady Chiltern, there is no list of your guests in *The Morning Post* of to-day. It has apparently been crowded out by the County Council, or the Lambeth Conference, or something equally boring. Could you let me have a list ? I have a particular reason for asking you.

LADY CHILTERN

I am sure Mr. Trafford will be able to give you one.

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT II. LORD GORING

Thanks, so much.

MABEL CHILTERN

Tommy is the most useful person in London.

LORD GORING

[*Turning to her.*] And who is the most ornamental?

MABEL CHILTERN

[*Triumphantly.*] I am.

LORD GORING

How clever of you to guess it! [*Takes up his hat and cane.*] Good-bye, Lady Chiltern! You will remember what I said to you, won't you?

LADY CHILTERN

Yes; but I don't know why you said it to me.

LORD GORING

I hardly know myself. Good-bye, Miss Mabel!

MABEL CHILTERN

[*With a little mowé of disappointment.*] I

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

wish you were not going. I have had four ACT II. wonderful adventures this morning; four and a half, in fact. You might stop and listen to some of them.

LORD GORING

How very selfish of you to have four and a half! There won't be any left for me.

MABEL CHILTERN

I don't want you to have any. They would not be good for you.

LORD GORING

That is the first unkind thing you have ever said to me. How charmingly you said it! Ten to-morrow.

MABEL CHILTERN

Sharp.

LORD GORING

Quite sharp. But don't bring Mr. Trafford.

MABEL CHILTERN

[With a little toss of the head.] Of course I shan't bring Tommy Trafford. Tommy Trafford is in great disgrace.

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT II. LORD GORING

I am delighted to hear it. [*Bows and goes out.*]

MABEL CHILTERN

Gertrude, I wish you would speak to Tommy Trafford.

LADY CHILTERN

What has poor Mr. Trafford done this time? Robert says he is the best secretary he has ever had.

MABEL CHILTERN

Well, Tommy has proposed to me again. Tommy really does nothing but propose to me. He proposed to me last night in the music-room, when I was quite unprotected, as there was an elaborate trio going on. I didn't dare to make the smallest repartee, I need hardly tell you. If I had, it would have stopped the music at once. Musical people are so absurdly unreasonable. They always want one to be perfectly dumb at the very moment when one is longing to be absolutely deaf. Then he proposed to me in broad daylight this morning, in front of that dreadful statue of Achilles. Really, the things that go on in

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

front of that work of art are quite appalling. ACT II.
The police should interfere. At luncheon I saw by the glare in his eye that he was going to propose again, and I just managed to check him in time by assuring him that I was a bimetallist. Fortunately I don't know what bimetallism means. And I don't believe anybody else does either. But the observation crushed Tommy for ten minutes. He looked quite shocked. And then Tommy is so annoying in the way he proposes. If he proposed at the top of his voice, I should not mind so much. That might produce some effect on the public. But he does it in a horrid confidential way. When Tommy wants to be romantic he talks to one just like a doctor. I am very fond of Tommy, but his methods of proposing are quite out of date. I wish, Gertrude, you would speak to him, and tell him that once a week is quite often enough to propose to any one, and that it should always be done in a manner that attracts some attention.

LADY CHILTERN

Dear Mabel, don't talk like that. Besides,
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AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT II. Robert thinks very highly of Mr. Trafford. He believes he has a brilliant future before him.

MABEL CHILTERN

Oh ! I wouldn't marry a man with a future before him for anything under the sun.

LADY CHILTERN

Mabel !

MABEL CHILTERN

I know, dear. You married a man with a future, didn't you ? But then Robert was a genius, and you have a noble, self-sacrificing character. You can stand geniuses. I have no character at all, and Robert is the only genius I could ever bear. As a rule, I think they are quite impossible. Geniuses talk so much, don't they ? Such a bad habit ! And they are always thinking about themselves, when I want them to be thinking about me. I must go round now and rehearse at Lady Basildon's. You remember, we are having tableaux, don't you ? The Triumph of something, I don't know what ! I hope it will be triumph of me. Only triumph I am really interested in at present. [Kisses LADY CHIL-

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

TERN and goes out ; then comes running back.] ACT II.

Oh, Gertrude, do you know who is coming to see you ? That dreadful Mrs. Cheveley, in a most lovely gown. Did you ask her ?

LADY CHILTERN

[*Rising.*] Mrs. Cheveley ! Coming to see me ? Impossible !

MABEL CHILTERN

I assure you she is coming upstairs, as large as life and not nearly so natural.

LADY CHILTERN

You need not wait, Mabel. Remember, Lady Basildon is expecting you.

MABEL CHILTERN

Oh ! I must shake hands with Lady Markby. She is delightful. I love being scolded by her.

[*Enter MASON.*]

MASON

Lady Markby. Mrs. Cheveley.

[*Enter LADY MARKBY and MRS. CHEVELEY.*]

LADY CHILTERN

[*Advancing to meet them.*] Dear Lady

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT II. Markby, how nice of you to come and see me! [Shakes hands with her, and bows somewhat distantly to MRS. CHEVELEY.] Won't you sit down, Mrs. Cheveley?

MRS. CHEVELEY

Thanks. Isn't that Miss Chiltern? I should like so much to know her.

LADY CHILTERN

Mabel, Mrs. Cheveley wishes to know you. [MABEL CHILTERN gives a little nod.]

MRS. CHEVELEY

[Sitting down.] I thought your frock so charming last night, Miss Chiltern. So simple and . . . suitable.

MABEL CHILTERN

Really? I must tell my dressmaker. It will be such a surprise to her. Good-bye, Lady Markby!

LADY MARKBY

Going already?

MABEL CHILTERN

I am so sorry but I am obliged to. I am just off to rehearsal. I have got to stand on my head in some tableaux.

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

LADY MARKBY

ACT II.

On your head, child? Oh! I hope not. I believe it is most unhealthy. [Takes a seat on the sofa next LADY CHILTERN.]

MABEL CHILTERN

But it is for an excellent charity: in aid of the Undeserving, the only people I am really interested in. I am the secretary, and Tommy Trafford is treasurer.

MRS. CHEVELEY

And what is Lord Goring?

MABEL CHILTERN

Oh! Lord Goring is president.

MRS. CHEVELEY

The post should suit him admirably, unless he has deteriorated since I knew him first.

LADY MARKBY

[Reflecting.] You are remarkably modern, Mabel. A little too modern, perhaps. Nothing is so dangerous as being too modern. One is apt to grow old-fashioned quite suddenly. I have known many instances of it.

MABEL CHILTERN

What a dreadful prospect!

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT II. LADY MARKBY

Ah! my dear, you need not be nervous. You will always be as pretty as possible. That is the best fashion there is, and the only fashion that England succeeds in setting.

MABEL CHILTERN

[*With a curtsey.*] Thank you so much, Lady Markby, for England . . . and myself. [Goes out.]

LADY MARKBY

[*Turning to LADY CHILTERN.*] Dear Gertrude, we just called to know if Mrs. Cheveley's diamond brooch has been found.

LADY CHILTERN

Here?

MRS. CHEVELEY

Yes. I missed it when I got back to Claridge's, and I thought I might possibly have dropped it here.

LADY CHILTERN

I have heard nothing about it. But I will send for the butler and ask. [*Touches the bell.*]

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

MRS. CHEVELEY

ACT II.

Oh, pray don't trouble, Lady Chiltern. I dare say I lost it at the Opera, before we came on here.

LADY MARKBY

Ah yes, I suppose it must have been at the Opera. The fact is, we all scramble and jostle so much nowadays that I wonder we have anything at all left on us at the end of an evening. I know myself that, when I am coming back from the Drawing Room, I always feel as if I hadn't a shred on me, except a small shred of decent reputation, just enough to prevent the lower classes making painful observations through the windows of the carriage. The fact is that our Society is terribly over-populated. Really, some one should arrange a proper scheme of assisted emigration. It would do a great deal of good.

MRS. CHEVELEY

I quite agree with you, Lady Markby. It is nearly six years since I have been in London for the Season, and I must say

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT II. Society has become dreadfully mixed. One sees the oddest people everywhere.

LADY MARKBY

That is quite true, dear. But one needn't know them. I'm sure I don't know half the people who come to my house. Indeed, from all I hear, I shouldn't like to.

[*Enter MASON.*]

LADY CHILTERN

What sort of a brooch was it that you lost, Mrs. Cheveley?

MRS. CHEVELEY

A diamond snake-brooch with a ruby, a rather large ruby.

LADY MARKBY

I thought you said there was a sapphire on the head, dear?

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*Smiling.*] No, Lady Markby—a ruby.

LADY MARKBY

[*Nodding her head.*] And very becoming, I am quite sure.

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

LADY CHILTERN

ACT II.

Has a ruby and diamond brooch been found
in any of the rooms this morning, Mason?

MASON

No, my lady.

MRS. CHEVELEY

It really is of no consequence, Lady Chiltern. I am so sorry to have put you to any inconvenience.

LADY CHILTERN

[*Coldly.*] Oh, it has been no inconvenience. That will do, Mason. You can bring tea.

[*Exit MASON.*]

LADY MARKBY

Well, I must say it is most annoying to lose anything. I remember once at Bath, years ago, losing in the Pump Room an exceedingly handsome cameo bracelet that Sir John had given me. I don't think he has ever given me anything since, I am sorry to say. He has sadly degenerated. Really, this horrid House of Commons quite ruins our husbands for us. I think the Lower House by far the greatest blow to a happy married

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT II. life that there has been since that terrible thing called the Higher Education of Women was invented.

LADY CHILTERN

Ah! it is heresy to say that in this house, Lady Markby. Robert is a great champion of the Higher Education of Women, and so, I am afraid, am I.

MRS. CHEVELEY

The higher education of men is what I should like to see. Men need it so sadly.

LADY MARKBY

They do, dear. But I am afraid such a scheme would be quite unpractical. I don't think man has much capacity for development. He has got as far as he can, and that is not far, is it? With regard to women, well, dear Gertrude, you belong to the younger generation, and I am sure it is all right if you approve of it. In my time, of course, we were taught not to understand anything. That was the old system, and wonderfully interesting it was. I assure you

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

that the amount of things I and my poor dear ACT II.
sister were taught not to understand was
quite extraordinary. But modern women
understand everything, I am told.

MRS. CHEVELEY

Except their husbands. That is the one
thing the modern woman never understands.

LADY MARKBY

And a very good thing too, dear, I dare say.
It might break up many a happy home if they
did. Not yours, I need hardly say, Gertrude.
You have married a pattern husband. I wish
I could say as much for myself. But since
Sir John has taken to attending the debates
regularly, which he never used to do in the
good old days, his language has become quite
impossible. He always seems to think that
he is addressing the House, and consequently
whenever he discusses the state of the agri-
cultural labourer, or the Welsh Church, or
something quite improper of that kind, I am
obliged to send all the servants out of the
room. It is not pleasant to see one's own
butler, who has been with one for twenty-

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT II. three years, actually blushing at the side-board, and the footmen making contortions in corners like persons in circuses. I assure you my life will be quite ruined unless they send John at once to the Upper House. He won't take any interest in politics then, will he? The House of Lords is so sensible. An assembly of gentlemen. But in his present state, Sir John is really a great trial. Why, this morning before breakfast was half over, he stood up on the hearthrug, put his hands in his pockets, and appealed to the country at the top of his voice. I left the table as soon as I had my second cup of tea, I need hardly say. But his violent language could be heard all over the house! I trust, Gertrude, that Sir Robert is not like that?

LADY CHILTERN

But I am very much interested in politics, Lady Markby. I love to hear Robert talk about them.

LADY MARKBY

Well, I hope he is not as devoted to Blue Books as Sir John is. I don't think they can be quite improving reading for any one.

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

MRS. CHEVELEY

ACT II.

[*Languidly.*] I have never read a Blue Book. I prefer books . . . in yellow covers.

LADY MARKBY

[*Genially unconscious.*] Yellow is a gayer colour, is it not? I used to wear yellow a good deal in my early days, and would do so now if Sir John was not so painfully personal in his observations, and a man on the question of dress is always ridiculous, is he not?

MRS. CHEVELEY

Oh, no! I think men are the only authorities on dress.

LADY MARKBY

Really? One wouldn't say so from the sort of hats they wear? would one?

[*The butler enters, followed by the footman. Tea is set on a small table close to LADY CHILTERN.*]

LADY CHILTERN

May I give you some tea, Mrs. Cheveley?

MRS. CHEVELEY

Thanks. [*The butler hands MRS. CHEVELEY a cup of tea on a salver.*]

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT II. LADY CHILTERN

Some tea, Lady Markby ?

LADY MARKBY

No thanks, dear. [*The servants go out.*] The fact is, I have promised to go round for ten minutes to see poor Lady Brancaster, who is in very great trouble. Her daughter, quite a well-brought-up girl, too, has actually become engaged to be married to a curate in Shropshire. It is very sad, very sad indeed. I can't understand this modern mania for curates. In my time we girls saw them, of course, running about the place like rabbits. But we never took any notice of them, I need hardly say. But I am told that nowadays country society is quite honeycombed with them. I think it most irreligious. And then the eldest son has quarrelled with his father, and it is said that when they meet at the club Lord Brancaster always hides himself behind the money article in *The Times*. However, I believe that is quite a common occurrence nowadays and that they have to take in extra copies of *The Times* at all the clubs in St. James's Street ; there are so many

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

sons who won't have anything to do with ACT II. their fathers, and so many fathers who won't speak to their sons. I think myself, it is very much to be regretted.

MRS. CHEVELEY

So do I. Fathers have so much to learn from their sons nowadays.

LADY MARKBY

Really, dear? What?

MRS. CHEVELEY

The art of living. The only really Fine Art we have produced in modern times.

LADY MARKBY

[*Shaking her head.*] Ah! I am afraid Lord Brancaster knew a good deal about that. More than his poor wife ever did. [Turning to LADY CHILTERN.] You know Lady Brancaster, don't you, dear?

LADY CHILTERN

Just slightly. She was staying at Langton last autumn, when we were there.

LADY MARKBY

Well, like all stout women, she looks the

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT II. very picture of happiness, as no doubt you noticed. But there are many tragedies in her family, besides this affair of the curate. Her own sister, Mrs. Jekyll, had a most unhappy life ; through no fault of her own, I am sorry to say. She ultimately was so broken-hearted that she went into a convent, or on to the operatic stage, I forget which. No ; I think it was decorative art-needlework she took up. I know she had lost all sense of pleasure in life. *[Rising.]* And now, Gertrude, if you will allow me, I shall leave Mrs. Cheveley in your charge and call back for her in a quarter of an hour. Or perhaps, dear Mrs. Cheveley, you wouldn't mind waiting in the carriage while I am with Lady Brancaster. As I intend it to be a visit of condolence, I shan't stay long.

MRS. CHEVELEY

[Rising.] I don't mind waiting in the carriage at all, provided there is somebody to look at one.

LADY MARKBY

Well, I hear the curate is always prowling about the house.

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

MRS. CHEVELEY

ACT II.

I am afraid I am not fond of girl friends.

LADY CHILTERN

[*Rising.*] Oh, I hope Mrs. Cheveley will stay here a little. I should like to have a few minutes' conversation with her.

MRS. CHEVELEY

How very kind of you, Lady Chiltern ! Believe me, nothing would give me greater pleasure.

LADY MARKBY

Ah ! no doubt you both have many pleasant reminiscences of your schooldays to talk over together. Good-bye, dear Gertrude ! Shall I see you at Lady Bonar's to-night ? She has discovered a wonderful new genius. He does . . . nothing at all, I believe. That is a great comfort, is it not ?

LADY CHILTERN

Robert and I are dining at home by ourselves to-night, and I don't think I shall go anywhere afterwards. Robert, of course, will have to be in the House. But there is nothing interesting on.

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT II. LADY MARKBY

Dining at home by yourselves? Is that quite prudent? Ah, I forgot, your husband is an exception. Mine is the general rule, and nothing ages a woman so rapidly as having married the general rule.

[*Exit LADY MARKBY.*]

MRS. CHEVELEY

Wonderful woman, Lady Markby, isn't she? Talks more and says less than anybody I ever met. She is made to be a public speaker. Much more so than her husband, though he is a typical Englishman, always dull and usually violent.

LADY CHILTERN

[*Makes no answer, but remains standing. There is a pause. Then the eyes of the two women meet. LADY CHILTERN looks stern and pale. MRS. CHEVELEY seems rather amused.*] Mrs. Cheveley, I think it is right to tell you quite frankly that, had I known who you really were, I should not have invited you to my house last night.

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*With an impertinent smile.*] Really?

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

LADY CHILTERN

ACT II.

I could not have done so.

MRS. CHEVELEY

I see that after all these years you have not changed a bit, Gertrude.

LADY CHILTERN

I never change.

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*Elevating her eyebrows.*] Then life has taught you nothing?

LADY CHILTERN

It has taught me that a person who has once been guilty of a dishonest and dishonourable action may be guilty of it a second time, and should be shunned.

MRS. CHEVELEY

Would you apply that rule to every one?

LADY CHILTERN

Yes, to every one, without exception.

MRS. CHEVELEY

Then I am sorry for you, Gertrude, very sorry for you.

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT II. LADY CHILTERN

You see now, I am sure, that for many reasons any further acquaintance between us during your stay in London is quite impossible?

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*Leaning back in her chair.*] Do you know, Gertrude, I don't mind your talking morality a bit. Morality is simply the attitude we adopt towards people whom we personally dislike. You dislike me. I am quite aware of that. And I have always detested you. And yet I have come here to do you a service.

LADY CHILTERN

[*Contemptuously.*] Like the service you wished to render my husband last night, I suppose. Thank heaven, I saved him from that.

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*Starting to her feet.*] It was you who made him write that insolent letter to me? It was you who made him break his promise?

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

LADY CHILTERN

Yes.

ACT II.

MRS. CHEVELEY

Then you must make him keep it. I give you till to-morrow morning—no more. If by that time your husband does not solemnly bind himself to help me in this great scheme in which I am interested—

LADY CHILTERN

This fraudulent speculation—

MRS. CHEVELEY

Call it what you choose. I hold your husband in the hollow of my hand, and if you are wise you will make him do what I tell him.

LADY CHILTERN

[*Rising and going towards her.*] You are impertinent. What has my husband to do with you ? With a woman like you ?

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*With a bitter laugh.*] In this world like meets with like. It is because your husband is himself fraudulent and dishonest that we

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT II. pair so well together. Between you and him there are chasms. He and I are closer than friends. We are enemies linked together. The same sin binds us.

LADY CHILTERN

How dare you class my husband with yourself? How dare you threaten him or me? Leave my house. You are unfit to enter it.

[SIR ROBERT CHILTERN enters from behind. *He hears his wife's last words, and sees to whom they are addressed. He grows deadly pale.*]

MRS. CHEVELEY

Your house! A house bought with the price of dishonour. A house, everything in which has been paid for by fraud. [Turns round and sees SIR ROBERT CHILTERN.] Ask him what the origin of his fortune is! Get him to tell you how he sold to a stockbroker a Cabinet secret. Learn from him to what you owe your position.

LADY CHILTERN

It is not true! Robert! It is not true!

MRS. CHEVELEY

[Pointing at him with outstretched finger.]

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

Look at him! Can he deny it? Does he ACT II.
dare to?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Go! Go at once. You have done your
worst now.

MRS. CHEVELEY

My worst? I have not yet finished with
you, with either of you. I give you both till
to-morrow at noon. If by then you don't
do what I bid you to do, the whole world
shall know the origin of Robert Chiltern.

[SIR ROBERT CHILTERN *strikes the bell. Enter
MASON.*]

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Show Mrs. Cheveley out.

[MRS. CHEVELEY starts; then bows with some-
what exaggerated politeness to LADY CHILTERN,
who makes no sign of response. As she passes
by SIR ROBERT CHILTERN, who is standing close
to the door, she pauses for a moment and looks
him straight in the face. She then goes out,
followed by the servant, who closes the door after
him. The husband and wife are left alone
LADY CHILTERN stands like some one in a dread-

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT II. *ful dream. Then she turns round and looks at her husband. She looks at him with strange eyes, as though she was seeing him for the first time.]*

LADY CHILTERN

You sold a Cabinet secret for money ! You began your life with fraud ! You built up your career on dishonour ! Oh, tell me it is not true ! Lie to me ! Lie to me ! Tell me it is not true !

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

What this woman said is quite true. But, Gertrude, listen to me. You don't realise how I was tempted. Let me tell you the whole thing. *[Goes towards her.]*

LADY CHILTERN

Don't come near me. Don't touch me. I feel as if you had soiled me for ever. Oh ! what a mask you have been wearing all these years ! A horrible painted mask ! You sold yourself for money. Oh ! a common thief were better. You put yourself up to sale to the highest bidder ! You were bought in the market. You lied to the whole world. And yet you will not lie to me.

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

ACT II.

[*Rushing towards her.*] Gertrude! Gertrude!

LADY CHILTERN

[*Thrusting him back with outstretched hands.*] No, don't speak! Say nothing! Your voice wakes terrible memories—memories of things that made me love you—memories of words that made me love you—memories that now are horrible to me. And how I worshipped you! You were to me something apart from common life, a thing pure, noble, honest, without stain. The world seemed to me finer because you were in it, and goodness more real because you lived. And now—oh, when I think that I made of a man like you my ideal! the ideal of my life!

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

There was your mistake. There was your error. The error all women commit. Why can't you women love us, faults and all? Why do you place us on monstrous pedestals? We have all feet of clay, women as well as men; but when we men love women, we love them knowing their weaknesses, their follies, their imperfections, love them all the more, it

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT II may be, for that reason. It is not the perfect, but the imperfect, who have need of love. It is when we are wounded by our own hands, or by the hands of others, that love should come to cure us—else what use is love at all? All sins, except a sin against itself, Love should forgive. All lives, save loveless lives, true Love should pardon. A man's love is like that. It is wider, larger, more human than a woman's. Women think that they are making ideals of men. What they are making of us are false idols merely. You made your false idol of me, and I had not the courage to come down, show you my wounds, tell you my weaknesses. I was afraid that I might lose your love, as I have lost it now. And so, last night you ruined my life for me—yes, ruined it! What this woman asked of me was nothing compared to what she offered to me. She offered security, peace, stability. The sin of my youth, that I had thought was buried, rose up in front of me, hideous, horrible, with its hands at my throat. I could have killed it for ever, sent it back into its tomb, destroyed its record, burned the one witness against me. You prevented me. No one but you, you

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

know it. And now what is there before me ACT II.
but public disgrace, ruin, terrible shame, the
mockery of the world, a lonely dishonoured
life, a lonely dishonoured death, it may be,
some day? Let women make no more ideals
of men! let them not put them on altars and
bow before them, or they may ruin other
lives as completely as you—you whom I have
so wildly loved—have ruined mine!

*[He passes from the room. LADY CHILTERN
rushes towards him, but the door is closed when
she reaches it. Pale with anguish, bewildered,
helpless, she sways like a plant in the water.
Her hands, outstretched, seem to tremble in the
air like blossoms in the wind. Then she flings
herself down beside a sofa and buries her face.
Her sobs are like the sobs of a child.]*

ACT DROP

THIRD ACT

THIRD ACT

SCENE

The Library in Lord Goring's house. An Adams room. On the right is the door leading into the hall. On the left, the door of the smoking-room. A pair of folding doors at the back open into the drawing-room. The fire is lit. Phipps, the butler, is arranging some newspapers on the writing-table. The distinction of Phipps is his impassivity. He has been termed by enthusiasts the Ideal Butler. The Sphinx is not so incommunicable. He is a mask with a manner. Of his intellectual or emotional life, history knows nothing. He represents the dominance of form.

[Enter LORD GORING in evening dress with a buttonhole. He is wearing a silk hat and Inverness cape. White-gloved, he carries a Louis Seize cane. His are all the delicate fopperies of Fashion. One sees that he stands in immediate relation to modern life, makes it indeed, and so masters it. He is the first well-dressed philosopher in the history of thought.]

LORD GORING

Got my second buttonhole for me, Phipps ?

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT III. PHIPPS

Yes, my lord. [*Takes his hat, cane, and cape, and presents new buttonhole on salver.*]

LORD GORING

Rather distinguished thing, Phipps. I am the only person of the smallest importance in London at present who wears a buttonhole.

PHIPPS

Yes, my lord. I have observed that.

LORD GORING

[*Taking out old buttonhole.*] You see, Phipps, Fashion is what one wears oneself. What is unfashionable is what other people wear.

PHIPPS

Yes, my lord.

LORD GORING

Just as vulgarity is simply the conduct of other people.

PHIPPS

Yes, my lord.

LORD GORING

[*Putting in new buttonhole.*] And falsehoods the truths of other people.

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

PHIPPS

ACT III.

Yes, my lord.

LORD GORING

Other people are quite dreadful. The only possible society is oneself.

PHIPPS

Yes, my lord.

LORD GORING

To love oneself is the beginning of a life-long romance, Phipps.

PHIPPS

Yes, my lord.

LORD GORING

[*Looking at himself in the glass.*] Don't think I quite like this buttonhole, Phipps. Makes me look a little too old. Makes me almost in the prime of life, eh, Phipps?

PHIPPS

I don't observe any alteration in your lordship's appearance.

LORD GORING

You don't, Phipps?

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT III. PHIPPS

No, my lord.

LORD GORING

I am not quite sure. For the future a more trivial buttonhole, Phipps, on Thursday evenings.

PHIPPS

I will speak to the florist, my lord. She has had a loss in her family lately, which perhaps accounts for the lack of triviality your lordship complains of in the buttonhole.

LORD GORING

Extraordinary thing about the lower classes in England — they are always losing their relations.

PHIPPS

Yes, my lord! They are extremely fortunate in that respect.

LORD GORING

[Turns round and looks at him. PHIPPS remains impassive.] Hum! Any letters, Phipps?

PHIPPS

Three, my lord. [Hands letters on a salver.]

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

LORD GORING

ACT III.

[*Takes letters.*] Want my cab round in twenty minutes.

PHIPPS

Yes, my lord. [*Goes towards door.*]

LORD GORING

[*Holds up letter in pink envelope.*] Ahem !
Phipps, when did this letter arrive ?

PHIPPS

It was brought by hand just after your lordship went to the Club.

LORD GORING

That will do. [*Exit PHIPPS.*] Lady Chiltern's handwriting on Lady Chiltern's pink notepaper. That is rather curious. I thought Robert was to write. Wonder what Lady Chiltern has got to say to me ? [*Sits at bureau and opens letter, and reads it.*] 'I want you. I trust you. I am coming to you. Gertrude.' [*Puts down the letter with a puzzled look. Then takes it up, and reads it again slowly.*] 'I want you. I trust you. I am coming to you.' So she has found out everything ! Poor woman ! Poor woman !

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT III. [*Pulls out watch and looks at it.*] But what an hour to call! Ten o'clock! I shall have to give up going to the Berkshires. However, it is always nice to be expected, and not to arrive. I am not expected at the Bachelors', so I shall certainly go there. Well, I will make her stand by her husband. That is the only thing for her to do. That is the only thing for any woman to do. It is the growth of the moral sense in women that makes marriage such a hopeless, one-sided institution. Ten o'clock. She should be here soon. I must tell Phipps I am not in to any one else. [*Goes towards bell.*]

[*Enter PHIPPS.*]

PHIPPS

Lord Caversham.

LORD GORING

Oh, why will parents always appear at the wrong time? Some extraordinary mistake in nature, I suppose. [*Enter LORD CAVERSHAM.*] Delighted to see you, my dear father. [*Goes to meet him.*]

LORD CAVERSHAM

Take my cloak off.

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

LORD GORING

ACT III

Is it worth while, father ?

LORD CAVERSHAM

Of course it is worth while, sir. Which is the most comfortable chair ?

LORD GORING

This one, father. It is the chair I use myself, when I have visitors.

LORD CAVERSHAM

Thank ye. No draught, I hope, in this room ?

LORD GORING

No, father.

LORD CAVERSHAM

[*Sitting down.*] Glad to hear it. Can't stand draughts. No draughts at home.

LORD GORING

Good many breezes, father.

LORD CAVERSHAM

Eh ? Eh ? Don't understand what you mean. Want to have a serious conversation with you, sir.

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT III. LORD GORING

My dear father! At this hour?

LORD CAVERSHAM

Well, sir, it is only ten o'clock. What is your objection to the hour? I think the hour is an admirable hour!

LORD GORING

Well, the fact is, father, this is not my day for talking seriously. I am very sorry, but it is not my day.

LORD CAVERSHAM

What do you mean, sir?

LORD GORING

During the Season, father, I only talk seriously on the first Tuesday in every month, from four to seven.

LORD CAVERSHAM

Well, make it Tuesday, sir, make it Tuesday.

LORD GORING

But it is after seven, father, and my doctor says I must not have any serious conversation after seven. It makes me talk in my sleep.

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

LORD CAVERSHAM

ACT III.

Talk in your sleep, sir? What does that matter? You are not married.

LORD GORING

No, father, I am not married.

LORD CAVERSHAM

Hum! That is what I have come to talk to you about, sir. You have got to get married, and at once. Why, when I was your age, sir, I had been an inconsolable widower for three months, and was already paying my addresses to your admirable mother. Damme, sir, it is your duty to get married. You can't be always living for pleasure. Every man of position is married nowadays. Bachelors are not fashionable any more. They are a damaged lot. Too much is known about them. You must get a wife, sir. Look where your friend Robert Chiltern has got to by probity, hard work, and a sensible marriage with a good woman. Why don't you imitate him, sir? Why don't you take him for your model?

LORD GORING

I think I shall, father.

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT III. LORD CAVERSHAM

I wish you would, sir. Then I should be happy. At present I make your mother's life miserable on your account. You are heartless, sir, quite heartless.

LORD GORING

I hope not, father.

LORD CAVERSHAM

And it is high time for you to get married. You are thirty-four years of age, sir.

LORD GORING

Yes, father, but I only admit to thirty-two —thirty-one and a half when I have a really good buttonhole. This buttonhole is not . . . trivial enough.

LORD CAVERSHAM

I tell you you are thirty-four, sir. And there is a draught in your room, besides, which makes your conduct worse. Why did you tell me there was no draught, sir? I feel a draught, sir, I feel it distinctly.

LORD GORING

So do I, father. It is a dreadful draught. I will come and see you to-morrow, father.

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

We can talk over anything you like. Let me ACT III.
help you on with your cloak, father.

LORD CAVERSHAM

No, sir; I have called this evening for a definite purpose, and I am going to see it through at all costs to my health or yours. Put down my cloak, sir.

LORD GORING

Certainly, father. But let us go into another room. [*Rings bell.*] There is a dreadful draught here. [*Enter PHIPPS.*] Phipps, is there a good fire in the smoking-room ?

PHIPPS

Yes, my lord.

LORD GORING

Come in there, father. Your sneezes are quite heartrending.

LORD CAVERSHAM

Well, sir, I suppose I have a right to sneeze when I choose ?

LORD GORING

[*Apologetically.*] Quite so, father. I was merely expressing sympathy.

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT III. LORD CAVERSHAM

Oh, damn sympathy. There is a great deal too much of that sort of thing going on nowadays.

LORD GORING

I quite agree with you, father. If there was less sympathy in the world there would be less trouble in the world.

LORD CAVERSHAM

[*Going towards the smoking-room.*] That is a paradox, sir. I hate paradoxes.

LORD GORING

So do I, father. Everybody one meets is a paradox nowadays. It is a great bore. It makes society so obvious.

LORD CAVERSHAM

[*Turning round, and looking at his son beneath his bushy eyebrows.*] Do you always really understand what you say, sir?

LORD GORING

[*After some hesitation.*] Yes, father, if I listen attentively.

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

LORD CAVERSHAM

ACT III.

[*Indignantly.*] If you listen attentively !
... Conceited young puppy !

[*Goes off grumbling into the smoking-room.*

PHIPPS enters.]

LORD GORING

Phipps, there is a lady coming to see me this evening on particular business. Show her into the drawing-room when she arrives. You understand ?

PHIPPS

Yes, my lord.

LORD GORING

It is a matter of the gravest importance, Phipps.

PHIPPS

I understand, my lord.

LORD GORING

No one else is to be admitted, under any circumstances.

PHIPPS

I understand, my lord. [*Bell rings.*]

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT III. LORD GORING

Ah! that is probably the lady. I shall see her myself.

[Just as he is going towards the door LORD CAVERSHAM enters from the smoking-room.]

LORD CAVERSHAM

Well, sir? am I to wait attendance on you?

LORD GORING

[Considerably perplexed.] In a moment, father. Do excuse me. *[LORD CAVERSHAM goes back.]* Well, remember my instructions, Phipps—into that room.

PHIPPS

Yes, my lord.

[LORD GORING goes into the smoking-room. HAROLD, the footman, shows MRS. CHEVELEY in. Lamia-like, she is in green and silver. She has a cloak of black satin, lined with dead rose-leaf silk.]

HAROLD

What name, madam?

MRS. CHEVELEY

[To PHIPPS, who advances towards her.] Is

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

Lord Goring not here? I was told he was at ACT III.
home?

PHIPPS

His lordship is engaged at present with
Lord Caversham, madam.

[*Turns a cold, glassy eye on HAROLD, who at
once retires.*]

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*To herself.*] How very filial!

PHIPPS

His lordship told me to ask you, madam,
to be kind enough to wait in the drawing-
room for him. His lordship will come to you
there.

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*With a look of surprise.*] Lord Goring
expects me?

PHIPPS

Yes, madam.

MRS. CHEVELEY

Are you quite sure?

PHIPPS

His lordship told me that if a lady called I

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT III. was to ask her to wait in the drawing-room.

[*Goes to the door of the drawing-room and opens it.*] His lordship's directions on the subject were very precise.

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*To herself.*] How thoughtful of him ! To expect the unexpected shows a thoroughly modern intellect. [*Goes towards the drawing-room and looks in.*] Ugh ! How dreary a bachelor's drawing-room always looks. I shall have to alter all this. [*PHIPPS brings the lamp from the writing-table.*] No, I don't care for that lamp. It is far too glaring. Light some candles.

PHIPPS

[*Replaces lamp.*] Certainly, madam.

MRS. CHEVELEY

I hope the candles have very becoming shades.

PHIPPS

We have had no complaints about them, madam, as yet.

[*Passes into the drawing-room and begins to light the candles.*]

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

MRS. CHEVELEY

ACT III.

[*To herself.*] I wonder what woman he is waiting for to-night. It will be delightful to catch him. Men always look so silly when they are caught. And they are always being caught. [Looks about room and approaches the writing-table.] What a very interesting room! What a very interesting picture! Wonder what his correspondence is like. [Takes up letters.] Oh, what a very uninteresting correspondence! Bills and cards, debts and dowagers! Who on earth writes to him on pink paper? How silly to write on pink paper! It looks like the beginning of a middle-class romance. Romance should never begin with sentiment. It should begin with science and end with a settlement. [Puts letter down, then takes it up again.] I know that handwriting. That is Gertrude Chiltern's. I remember it perfectly. The ten commandments in every stroke of the pen, and the moral law all over the page. Wonder what Gertrude is writing to him about? Something horrid about me, I suppose. How I detest that woman! [Reads it.] 'I trust you. I want you. I am

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT III. coming to you. Gertrude.' 'I trust you. I want you. I am coming to you.'

[A look of triumph comes over her face. She is just about to steal the letter, when PHIPPS comes in.]

PHIPPS

The candles in the drawing-room are lit, madam, as you directed.

MRS. CHEVELEY

Thank you. *[Rises hastily and slips the letter under a large silver-cased blotting-book that is lying on the table.]*

PHIPPS

I trust the shades will be to your liking, madam. They are the most becoming we have. They are the same as his lordship uses himself when he is dressing for dinner.

MRS. CHEVELEY

[With a smile.] Then I am sure they will be perfectly right.

PHIPPS

[Gravely.] Thank you, madam.

[MRS. CHEVELEY goes into the drawing-room. PHIPPS closes the door and retires. The door is

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

then slowly opened, and MRS. CHEVELEY comes ACT III. out and creeps stealthily towards the writing-table. Suddenly voices are heard from the smoking-room. MRS. CHEVELEY grows pale, and stops. The voices grow louder, and she goes back into the drawing-room, biting her lip.]

[Enter LORD GORING and LORD CAVERSHAM.]

LORD GORING

[*Expostulating.*] My dear father, if I am to get married, surely you will allow me to choose the time, place, and person? Particularly the person.

LORD CAVERSHAM

[*Testily.*] That is a matter for me, sir. You would probably make a very poor choice. It is I who should be consulted, not you. There is property at stake. It is not a matter for affection. Affection comes later on in married life.

LORD GORING

Yes. In married life affection comes when people thoroughly dislike each other, father, doesn't it? [Puts on LORD CAVERSHAM's cloak for him.]

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT III. LORD CAVERSHAM

Certainly, sir. I mean certainly not, sir. You are talking very foolishly to-night. What I say is that marriage is a matter for common sense.

LORD GORING

But women who have common sense are so curiously plain, father, aren't they? Of course I only speak from hearsay.

LORD CAVERSHAM

No woman, plain or pretty, has any common sense at all, sir. Common sense is the privilege of our sex.

LORD GORING

Quite so. And we men are so self-sacrificing that we never use it, do we, father?

LORD CAVERSHAM

I use it, sir. I use nothing else.

LORD GORING

So my mother tells me.

LORD CAVERSHAM

It is the secret of your mother's happiness. You are very heartless, sir, very heartless.

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

LORD GORING

ACT III.

I hope not, father.

[Goes out for a moment. Then returns, looking rather put out, with SIR ROBERT CHILTERN.]

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

My dear Arthur, what a piece of good luck meeting you on the doorstep ! Your servant had just told me you were not at home. How extraordinary !

LORD GORING

The fact is, I am horribly busy to-night, Robert, and I gave orders I was not at home to any one. Even my father had a comparatively cold reception. He complained of a draught the whole time.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Ah ! you must be at home to me, Arthur. You are my best friend. Perhaps by to-morrow you will be my only friend. My wife has discovered everything.

LORD GORING

Ah ! I guessed as much !

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[Looking at him.] Really ! How ?

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT III. LORD GORING

[*After some hesitation.*] Oh, merely by something in the expression of your face as you came in. Who told her?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Mrs. Cheveley herself. And the woman I love knows that I began my career with an act of low dishonesty, that I built up my life upon sands of shame—that I sold, like a common huckster, the secret that had been intrusted to me as a man of honour. I thank heaven poor Lord Radley died without knowing that I betrayed him. I would to God I had died before I had been so horribly tempted, or had fallen so low. [*Burying his face in his hands.*]

LORD GORING

[*After a pause.*] You have heard nothing from Vienna yet, in answer to your wire?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Looking up.*] Yes; I got a telegram from the first secretary at eight o'clock to-night.

LORD GORING

Well?

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

ACT III.

Nothing is absolutely known against her. On the contrary, she occupies a rather high position in society. It is a sort of open secret that Baron Arnheim left her the greater portion of his immense fortune. Beyond that I can learn nothing.

LORD GORING

She doesn't turn out to be a spy, then ?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Oh ! spies are of no use nowadays. Their profession is over. The newspapers do their work instead.

LORD GORING

And thunderingly well they do it.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Arthur, I am parched with thirst. May I ring for something ? Some hock and seltzer ?

LORD GORING

Certainly. Let me. [*Rings the bell.*]

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Thanks ! I don't know what to do, Arthur, I don't know what to do, and you are my

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT III. only friend. But what a friend you are—the one friend I can trust. I can trust you absolutely, can't I?

[Enter PHIPPS.]

LORD GORING

My dear Robert, of course. Oh! [To PHIPPS.] Bring some hock and seltzer.

PHIPPS

Yes, my lord.

LORD GORING

And Phipps!

PHIPPS

Yes, my lord.

LORD GORING

Will you excuse me for a moment, Robert? I want to give some directions to my servant.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Certainly.

LORD GORING

When that lady calls, tell her that I am not expected home this evening. Tell her that I have been suddenly called out of town. You understand?

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

PHIPPS

ACT III.

The lady is in that room, my lord. You told me to show her into that room, my lord.

LORD GORING

You did perfectly right. [*Exit PHIPPS.*] What a mess I am in. No; I think I shall get through it. I'll give her a lecture through the door. Awkward thing to manage, though.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Arthur, tell me what I should do. My life seems to have crumbled about me. I am a ship without a rudder in a night without a star.

LORD GORING

Robert, you love your wife, don't you?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

I love her more than anything in the world. I used to think ambition the great thing. It is not. Love is the great thing in the world. There is nothing but love, and I love her. But I am defamed in her eyes. I am ignoble in her eyes. There is a wide gulf between us now. She has found me out, Arthur, she has found me out.

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT III. LORD GORING

Has she never in her life done some folly—some indiscretion—that she should not forgive your sin?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

My wife! Never! She does not know what weakness or temptation is. I am of clay like other men. She stands apart as good women do—pitiless in her perfection—cold and stern and without mercy. But I love her, Arthur. We are childless, and I have no one else to love, no one else to love me. Perhaps if God had sent us children she might have been kinder to me. But God has given us a lonely house. And she has cut my heart in two. Don't let us talk of it. I was brutal to her this evening. But I suppose when sinners talk to saints they are brutal always. I said to her things that were hideously true, on my side, from my standpoint, from the standpoint of men. But don't let us talk of that.

LORD GORING

Your wife will forgive you. Perhaps at

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

this moment she is forgiving you. She loves ACT III.
you, Robert. Why should she not forgive ?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

God grant it! God grant it! [Buries his face in his hands.] But there is something more I have to tell you, Arthur.

[Enter PHIPPS with drinks.]

PHIPPS

[Hands hock and seltzer to SIR ROBERT CHILTERN.] Hock and seltzer, sir.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Thank you.

LORD GORING

Is your carriage here, Robert ?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

No ; I walked from the club.

LORD GORING

Sir Robert will take my cab, Phipps.

PHIPPS

Yes, my lord.

[Exit.]

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT III. LORD GORING

Robert, you don't mind my sending you away ?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Arthur, you must let me stay for five minutes. I have made up my mind what I am going to do to-night in the House. The debate on the Argentine Canal is to begin at eleven. [*A chair falls in the drawing-room.*] What is that ?

LORD GORING

Nothing.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

I heard a chair fall in the next room. Some one has been listening.

LORD GORING

No, no ; there is no one there.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

There is some one. There are lights in the room, and the door is ajar. Some one has been listening to every secret of my life. Arthur, what does this mean ?

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

LORD GORING

ACT III.

Robert, you are excited, unnerved. I tell you there is no one in that room. Sit down, Robert.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Do you give me your word that there is no one there?

LORD GORING

Yes.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Your word of honour? [*Sits down.*]

LORD GORING

Yes.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Rises.*] Arthur, let me see for myself.

LORD GORING

No, no.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

If there is no one there why should I not look in that room? Arthur, you must let me go into that room and satisfy myself. Let me know that no eavesdropper has heard my

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT III. life's secret. Arthur, you don't realise what I am going through.

LORD GORING

Robert, this must stop. I have told you that there is no one in that room—that is enough.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Rushes to the door of the room.*] It is not enough. I insist on going into this room. You have told me there is no one there, so what reason can you have for refusing me ?

LORD GORING

For God's sake, don't ! There is some one there. Some one whom you must not see.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Ah, I thought so !

LORD GORING

I forbid you to enter that room.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Stand back. My life is at stake. And I don't care who is there. I will know who it is to whom I have told my secret and my shame. [*Enters room.*]

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

LORD GORING

ACT III.

Great Heavens ! his own wife !

[SIR ROBERT CHILTERN comes back, with a look of scorn and anger on his face.]

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

What explanation have you to give me for the presence of that woman here ?

LORD GORING

Robert, I swear to you on my honour that that lady is stainless and guiltless of all offence towards you.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

She is a vile, an infamous thing !

LORD GORING

Don't say that, Robert ! It was for your sake she came here. It was to try and save you she came here. She loves you and no one else.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

You are mad. What have I to do with her intrigues with you ? Let her remain your mistress ! You are well suited to each other. She, corrupt and shameful—you, false as a friend, treacherous as an enemy even—

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT III. LORD GORING

It is not true, Robert. Before heaven, it is not true. In her presence and in yours I will explain all.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Let me pass, sir. You have lied enough upon your word of honour.

[SIR ROBERT CHILTERN goes out. LORD GORING rushes to the door of the drawing-room, when MRS. CHEVELEY comes out, looking radiant and much amused.]

MRS. CHEVELEY

[With a mock curtsey.] Good evening, Lord Goring!

LORD GORING

Mrs. Cheveley! Great Heavens! . . . May I ask what you were doing in my drawing-room?

MRS. CHEVELEY

Merely listening. I have a perfect passion for listening through keyholes. One always hears such wonderful things through them.

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

LORD GORING

ACT III.

Doesn't that sound rather like tempting Providence?

MRS. CHEVELEY

Oh! surely Providence can resist temptation by this time. [Makes a sign to him to take her cloak off, which he does.]

LORD GORING

I am glad you have called. I am going to give you some good advice.

MRS. CHEVELEY

Oh! pray don't. One should never give a woman anything that she can't wear in the evening.

LORD GORING

I see you are quite as wilful as you used to be.

MRS. CHEVELEY

Far more! I have greatly improved. I have had more experience.

LORD GORING

Too much experience is a dangerous thing.

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT III. Pray have a cigarette. Half the pretty women in London smoke cigarettes. Personally I prefer the other half.

MRS. CHEVELEY

Thanks. I never smoke. My dressmaker wouldn't like it, and a woman's first duty in life is to her dressmaker, isn't it? What the second duty is, no one has as yet discovered.

LORD GORING

You have come here to sell me Robert Chiltern's letter, haven't you?

MRS. CHEVELEY

To offer it to you on conditions. How did you guess that?

LORD GORING

Because you haven't mentioned the subject. Have you got it with you?

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*Sitting down.*] Oh, no! A well-made dress has no pockets.

LORD GORING

What is your price for it?

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

MRS. CHEVELEY

ACT III.

How absurdly English you are! The English think that a cheque-book can solve every problem in life. Why, my dear Arthur, I have very much more money than you have, and quite as much as Robert Chiltern has got hold of. Money is not what I want.

LORD GORING

What do you want then, Mrs. Cheveley?

MRS. CHEVELEY

Why don't you call me Laura?

LORD GORING

I don't like the name.

MRS. CHEVELEY

You used to adore it.

LORD GORING

Yes: that's why. [MRS. CHEVELEY motions to him to sit down beside her. He smiles, and does so.]

MRS. CHEVELEY

Arthur, you loved me once.

LORD GORING

Yes.

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT III. MRS. CHEVELEY

And you asked me to be your wife.

LORD GORING

That was the natural result of my loving you.

MRS. CHEVELEY

And you threw me over because you saw, or said you saw, poor old Lord Mortlake trying to have a violent flirtation with me in the conservatory at Tenby.

LORD GORING

I am under the impression that my lawyer settled that matter with you on certain terms . . . dictated by yourself.

MRS. CHEVELEY

At that time I was poor; you were rich.

LORD GORING

Quite so. That is why you pretended to love me.

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*Shrugging her shoulders.*] Poor old Lord Mortlake, who had only two topics of conversation, his gout and his wife! I never

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

could quite make out which of the two he was ACT III talking about. He used the most horrible language about them both. Well, you were silly, Arthur. Why, Lord Mortlake was never anything more to me than an amusement. One of those utterly tedious amusements one only finds at an English country house on an English country Sunday. I don't think any one at all morally responsible for what he or she does at an English country house.

LORD GORING

Yes. I know lots of people think that.

MRS. CHEVELEY

I loved you, Arthur.

LORD GORING

My dear Mrs. Cheveley, you have always been far too clever to know anything about love.

MRS. CHEVELEY

I did love you. And you loved me. You know you loved me; and love is a very wonderful thing. I suppose that when a man has once loved a woman, he will do any-

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT III. thing for her, except continue to love her?
[*Puts her hand on his.*]

LORD GORING

[*Taking his hand away quietly.*] Yes: except that.

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*After a pause.*] I am tired of living abroad. I want to come back to London. I want to have a charming house here. I want to have a salon. If one could only teach the English how to talk, and the Irish how to listen, society here would be quite civilised. Besides, I have arrived at the romantic stage. When I saw you last night at the Chilterns', I knew you were the only person I had ever cared for, if I ever have cared for anybody, Arthur. And so, on the morning of the day you marry me, I will give you Robert Chiltern's letter. That is my offer. I will give it to you now, if you promise to marry me.

LORD GORING

Now?

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*Smiling.*] To-morrow.

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

LORD GORING

ACT III.

Are you really serious ?

MRS. CHEVELEY

Yes, quite serious.

LORD GORING

I should make you a very bad husband.

MRS. CHEVELEY

I don't mind bad husbands. I have had two. They amused me immensely.

LORD GORING

You mean that you amused yourself immensely, don't you ?

MRS. CHEVELEY

What do you know about my married life ?

LORD GORING

Nothing : but I can read it like a book.

MRS. CHEVELEY

What book ?

LORD GORING

[*Rising.*] The Book of Numbers.

MRS. CHEVELEY

Do you think it is quite charming of you

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT III. to be so rude to a woman in your own house?

LORD GORING

In the case of very fascinating women, sex is a challenge, not a defence.

MRS. CHEVELEY

I suppose that is meant for a compliment. My dear Arthur, women are never disarmed by compliments. Men always are. That is the difference between the two sexes.

LORD GORING

Women are never disarmed by anything, as far as I know them.

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*After a pause.*] Then you are going to allow your greatest friend, Robert Chiltern, to be ruined, rather than marry some one who really has considerable attractions left. I thought you would have risen to some great height of self-sacrifice, Arthur. I think you should. And the rest of your life you could spend in contemplating your own perfections.

LORD GORING

Oh! I do that as it is. And self-sacrifice

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

is a thing that should be put down by law. ACT III.
It is so demoralising to the people for whom
one sacrifices oneself. They always go to the
bad.

MRS. CHEVELEY

As if anything could demoralise Robert
Chiltern! You seem to forget that I know
his real character.

LORD GORING

What you know about him is not his real
character. It was an act of folly done in his
youth, dishonourable, I admit, shameful, I
admit, unworthy of him, I admit, and there-
fore . . . not his true character.

MRS. CHEVELEY

How you men stand up for each other!

LORD GORING

How you women war against each other!

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*Bitterly.*] I only war against one woman,
against Gertrude Chiltern. I hate her. I
hate her now more than ever.

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT III. LORD GORING

Because you have brought a real tragedy into her life, I suppose.

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*With a sneer.*] Oh, there is only one real tragedy in a woman's life. The fact that her past is always her lover, and her future invariably her husband.

LORD GORING

Lady Chiltern knows nothing of the kind of life to which you are alluding.

MRS. CHEVELEY

A woman whose size in gloves is seven and three-quarters never knows much about anything. You know Gertrude has always worn seven and three-quarters? That is one of the reasons why there was never any moral sympathy between us. . . . Well, Arthur, I suppose this romantic interview may be regarded as at an end. You admit it was romantic, don't you? For the privilege of being your wife I was ready to surrender a great prize, the climax of my diplomatic career. You decline. Very well. If Sir Robert doesn't

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

uphold my Argentine scheme, I expose him. ACT III.
Voilà tout.

LORD GORING

You mustn't do that. It would be vile, horrible, infamous.

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*Shrugging her shoulders.*] Oh! don't use big words. They mean so little. It is a commercial transaction. That is all. There is no good mixing up sentimentality in it. I offered to sell Robert Chiltern a certain thing. If he won't pay me my price, he will have to pay the world a greater price. There is no more to be said. I must go. Good-bye. Won't you shake hands?

LORD GORING

With you? No. Your transaction with Robert Chiltern may pass as a loathsome commercial transaction of a loathsome commercial age; but you seem to have forgotten that you came here to-night to talk of love, you whose lips desecrated the word love, you to whom the thing is a book closely sealed, went this afternoon to the house of one of the most

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT III. noble and gentle women in the world to degrade her husband in her eyes, to try and kill her love for him, to put poison in her heart, and bitterness in her life, to break her idol, and, it may be, spoil her soul. That I cannot forgive you. That was horrible. For that there can be no forgiveness.

MRS. CHEVELEY

Arthur, you are unjust to me. Believe me, you are quite unjust to me. I didn't go to taunt Gertrude at all. I had no idea of doing anything of the kind when I entered. I called with Lady Markby simply to ask whether an ornament, a jewel, that I lost somewhere last night, had been found at the Chilterns'. If you don't believe me, you can ask Lady Markby. She will tell you it is true. The scene that occurred happened after Lady Markby had left, and was really forced on me by Gertrude's rudeness and sneers. I called, oh!—a little out of malice if you like—but really to ask if a diamond brooch of mine had been found. That was the origin of the whole thing.

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

LORD GORING

ACT III.

A diamond snake-brooch with a ruby?

MRS. CHEVELEY

Yes. How do you know?

LORD GORING

Because it is found. In point of fact, I found it myself, and stupidly forgot to tell the butler anything about it as I was leaving. [Goes over to the writing-table and pulls out the drawers.] It is in this drawer. No, that one. This is the brooch, isn't it? [Holds up the brooch.]

MRS. CHEVELEY

Yes. I am so glad to get it back. It was . . . a present.

LORD GORING

Won't you wear it?

MRS. CHEVELEY

Certainly, if you pin it in. [LORD GORING suddenly clasps it on her arm.] Why do you put it on as a bracelet? I never knew it could be worn as a bracelet.

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT III. LORD GORING

Really ?

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*Holding out her handsome arm.*] No ; but it looks very well on me as a bracelet, doesn't it ?

LORD GORING

Yes ; much better than when I saw it last.

MRS. CHEVELEY

When did you see it last ?

LORD GORING

[*Calmly.*] Oh, ten years ago, on Lady Berkshire, from whom you stole it.

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*Starting.*] What do you mean ?

LORD GORING

I mean that you stole that ornament from my cousin, Mary Berkshire, to whom I gave it when she was married. Suspicion fell on a wretched servant, who was sent away in disgrace. I recognised it last night. I determined to say nothing about it till I had found

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

the thief. I have found the thief now, and I ACT III.
have heard her own confession.

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*Tossing her head.*] It is not true.

LORD GORING

You know it is true. Why, thief is written
across your face at this moment.

MRS. CHEVELEY

I will deny the whole affair from beginning
to end. I will say that I have never seen
this wretched thing, that it was never in my
possession.

[*MRS. CHEVELEY tries to get the bracelet off
her arm, but fails. LORD GORING looks on
amused. Her thin fingers tear at the jewel to
no purpose. A curse breaks from her.*]

LORD GORING

The drawback of stealing a thing, Mrs.
Cheveley, is that one never knows how won-
derful the thing that one steals is. You can't
get that bracelet off, unless you know where
the spring is. And I see you don't know
where the spring is. It is rather difficult to
find.

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT III. MRS. CHEVELEY

You brute! You coward! [*She tries again to unclasp the bracelet, but fails.*]

LORD GORING

Oh! don't use big words. They mean so little.

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*Again tears at the bracelet in a paroxysm of rage, with inarticulate sounds. Then stops, and looks at LORD GORING.*] What are you going to do?

LORD GORING

I am going to ring for my servant. He is an admirable servant. Always comes in the moment one rings for him. When he comes I will tell him to fetch the police.

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*Trembling.*] The police? What for?

LORD GORING

To-morrow the Berkshires will prosecute you. That is what the police are for.

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*Is now in an agony of physical terror. Her*

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

face is distorted. Her mouth awry. A mask ACT III. has fallen from her. She is, for the moment, dreadful to look at.] Don't do that. I will do anything you want. Anything in the world you want.

LORD GORING

Give me Robert Chiltern's letter.

MRS. CHEVELEY

Stop! Stop! Let me have time to think.

LORD GORING

Give me Robert Chiltern's letter.

MRS. CHEVELEY

I have not got it with me. I will give it to you to-morrow.

LORD GORING

You know you are lying. Give it to me at once. [MRS. CHEVELEY pulls the letter out, and hands it to him. She is horribly pale.] This is it?

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*In a hoarse voice.*] Yes.

LORD GORING

[*Takes the letter, examines it, sighs, and*

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT III. *burns it over the lamp.*] For so well-dressed a woman, Mrs. Cheveley, you have moments of admirable common sense. I congratulate you.

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*Catches sight of LADY CHILTERN's letter, the cover of which is just showing from under the blotting-book.*] Please get me a glass of water.

LORD GORING

Certainly. [*Goes to the corner of the room and pours out a glass of water. While his back is turned MRS. CHEVELEY steals LADY CHILTERN's letter. When LORD GORING returns with the glass she refuses it with a gesture.*]

MRS. CHEVELEY

'Thank you. Will you help me on with my cloak ?

LORD GORING

With pleasure. [*Puts her cloak on.*]

MRS. CHEVELEY

Thanks. I am never going to try to harm Robert Chiltern again.

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

LORD GORING

ACT III.

Fortunately you have not the chance, Mrs. Cheveley.

MRS. CHEVELEY

Well, if even I had the chance, I wouldn't. On the contrary, I am going to render him a great service.

LORD GORING

I am charmed to hear it. It is a reformation.

MRS. CHEVELEY

Yes. I can't bear so upright a gentleman, so honourable an English gentleman, being so shamefully deceived, and so—

LORD GORING

Well?

MRS. CHEVELEY

I find that somehow Gertrude Chiltern's dying speech and confession has strayed into my pocket.

LORD GORING

What do you mean?

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT III. MRS. CHEVELEY

[With a bitter note of triumph in her voice.]
I mean that I am going to send Robert Chiltern the love-letter his wife wrote to you to-night.

LORD GORING

Love-letter?

MRS. CHEVELEY

[Laughing.] 'I want you. I trust you. I am coming to you. Gertrude.'

[LORD GORING rushes to the bureau and takes up the envelope, finds it empty, and turns round.]

LORD GORING

You wretched woman, must you always be thieving? Give me back that letter. I'll take it from you by force. You shall not leave my room till I have got it.

[He rushes towards her, but MRS. CHEVELEY at once puts her hand on the electric bell that is on the table. The bell sounds with shrill reverberations, and PHIPPS enters.]

MRS. CHEVELEY

[After a pause.] Lord Goring merely rang

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

that you should show me out. Good-night, ACT III.
Lord Goring!

[Goes out followed by PHIPPS. Her face is illumined with evil triumph. There is joy in her eyes. Youth seems to have come back to her. Her last glance is like a swift arrow. LORD GORING bites his lip, and lights a cigarette.]

ACT DROP

FOURTH ACT

FOURTH ACT

SCENE

Same as Act II.

[LORD GORING is standing by the fireplace with his hands in his pockets. He is looking rather bored.]

LORD GORING

[Pulls out his watch, inspects it, and rings the bell.] It is a great nuisance. I can't find any one in this house to talk to. And I am full of interesting information. I feel like the latest edition of something or other.

[Enter servant.]

JAMES

Sir Robert is still at the Foreign Office, my lord.

LORD GORING

Lady Chiltern not down yet?

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT IV. JAMES

Her ladyship has not yet left her room.
Miss Chiltern has just come in from riding.

LORD GORING

[*To himself.*] Ah! that is something.

JAMES

Lord Caversham has been waiting some time in the library for Sir Robert. I told him your lordship was here.

LORD GORING

Thank you. Would you kindly tell him I've gone?

JAMES

[*Bowing.*] I shall do so, my lord.

[*Exit servant.*]

LORD GORING

Really, I don't want to meet my father three days running. It is a great deal too much excitement for any son. I hope to goodness he won't come up. Fathers should be neither seen nor heard. That is the only proper basis for family life. Mothers are different. Mothers are darlings. [*Throws*

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

himself down into a chair, picks up a paper and ACT IV begins to read it.]

[Enter LORD CAVERSHAM.]

LORD CAVERSHAM

Well, sir, what are you doing here? Wasting your time as usual, I suppose?

LORD GORING

[*Throws down paper and rises.*] My dear father, when one pays a visit it is for the purpose of wasting other people's time, not one's own.

LORD CAVERSHAM

Have you been thinking over what I spoke to you about last night?

LORD GORING

I have been thinking about nothing else.

LORD CAVERSHAM

Engaged to be married yet?

LORD GORING

[*Genially.*] Not yet: but I hope to be before lunch-time.

LORD CAVERSHAM

[*Caustically.*] You can have till dinner-

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT IV. time if it would be of any convenience to you.

LORD GORING

Thanks awfully, but I think I'd sooner be engaged before lunch.

LORD CAVERSHAM

Humph! Never know when you are serious or not.

LORD GORING

Neither do I, father.

[*A pause.*]

LORD CAVERSHAM

I suppose you have read *The Times* this morning?

LORD GORING

[*Airily.*] *The Times*? Certainly not. I only read *The Morning Post*. All that one should know about modern life is where the Duchesses are; anything else is quite demoralising.

LORD CAVERSHAM

Do you mean to say you have not read

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

The Times leading article on Robert Chil- ACT IV.
tern's career?

LORD GORING

Good heavens! No. What does it say?

LORD CAVERSHAM

What should it say, sir? Everything complimentary, of course. Chiltern's speech last night on this Argentine Canal scheme was one of the finest pieces of oratory ever delivered in the House since Canning.

LORD GORING

Ah! Never heard of Canning. Never wanted to. And did . . . did Chiltern uphold the scheme?

LORD CAVERSHAM

Uphold it, sir? How little you know him! Why, he denounced it roundly, and the whole system of modern political finance. This speech is the turning-point in his career, as *The Times* points out. You should read this article, sir. [Opens *The Times*.] 'Sir Robert Chiltern . . . most rising of our young statesmen . . . Brilliant orator . . . Unblemished career . . . Well-known integrity of character

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT IV. . . . Represents what is best in English public life . . . Noble contrast to the lax morality so common among foreign politicians.' They will never say that of you, sir.

LORD GORING

I sincerely hope not, father. However, I am delighted at what you tell me about Robert, thoroughly delighted. It shows he has got pluck.

LORD CAVERSHAM

He has got more than pluck, sir, he has got genius.

LORD GORING

Ah! I prefer pluck. It is not so common, nowadays, as genius is.

LORD CAVERSHAM

I wish you would go into Parliament.

LORD GORING

My dear father, only people who look dull ever get into the House of Commons, and only people who are dull ever succeed there.

LORD CAVERSHAM

Why don't you try to do something useful in life?

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

LORD GORING

ACT IV.

I am far too young.

LORD CAVERSHAM

[*Testily.*] I hate this affectation of youth, sir. It is a great deal too prevalent nowadays.

LORD GORING

Youth isn't an affectation. Youth is an art.

LORD CAVERSHAM

Why don't you propose to that pretty Miss Chiltern ?

LORD GORING

I am of a very nervous disposition, especially in the morning.

LORD CAVERSHAM

I don't suppose there is the smallest chance of her accepting you.

LORD GORING

I don't know how the betting stands to-day.

LORD CAVERSHAM

If she did accept you she would be the prettiest fool in England.

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT IV. LORD GORING

That is just what I should like to marry. A thoroughly sensible wife would reduce me to a condition of absolute idiocy in less than six months.

LORD CAVERSHAM

You don't deserve her, sir.

LORD GORING

My dear father, if we men married the women we deserved, we should have a very bad time of it.

[Enter MABEL CHILTERN.]

MABEL CHILTERN

Oh! . . . How do you do, Lord Caversham? I hope Lady Caversham is quite well?

LORD CAVERSHAM

Lady Caversham is as usual, as usual.

LORD GORING

Good morning, Miss Mabel!

MABEL CHILTERN

[Taking no notice at all of LORD GORING, and addressing herself exclusively to LORD CAVERS-]

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

HAM.] And Lady Caversham's bonnets . . . ACT IV.
are they at all better?

LORD CAVERSHAM

They have had a serious relapse, I am sorry
to say.

LORD GORING

Good morning, Miss Mabel!

MABEL CHILTERN

[*To LORD CAVERSHAM.*] I hope an operation
will not be necessary.

LORD CAVERSHAM

[*Smiling at her pertness.*] If it is, we shall
have to give Lady Caversham a narcotic.
Otherwise she would never consent to have a
feather touched.

LORD GORING

[*With increased emphasis.*] Good morning,
Miss Mabel!

MABEL CHILTERN

[*Turning round with feigned surprise.*] Oh,
are you here? Of course you understand
that after your breaking your appointment I
am never going to speak to you again.

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT IV. LORD GORING

Oh, please don't say such a thing. You are the one person in London I really like to have to listen to me.

MABEL CHILTERN

Lord Goring, I never believe a single word that either you or I say to each other.

LORD CAVERSHAM

You are quite right, my dear, quite right . . . as far as he is concerned, I mean.

MABEL CHILTERN

Do you think you could possibly make your son behave a little better occasionally? Just as a change.

LORD CAVERSHAM

I regret to say, Miss Chiltern, that I have no influence at all over my son. I wish I had. If I had, I know what I would make him do.

MABEL CHILTERN

I am afraid that he has one of those terribly weak natures that are not susceptible to influence.

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

LORD CAVERSHAM

ACT IV.

He is very heartless, very heartless.

LORD GORING

It seems to me that I am a little in the way here.

MABEL CHILTERN

It is very good for you to be in the way, and to know what people say of you behind your back.

LORD GORING

I don't at all like knowing what people say of me behind my back. It makes me far too conceited.

LORD CAVERSHAM

After that, my dear, I really must bid you good morning.

MABEL CHILTERN

Oh! I hope you are not going to leave me all alone with Lord Goring? Especially at such an early hour in the day.

LORD CAVERSHAM

I am afraid I can't take him with me

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT IV. to Downing Street. It is not the Prime Minister's day for seeing the unemployed.

[Shakes hands with MABEL CHILTERN, takes up his hat and stick, and goes out, with a parting glare of indignation at LORD GORING.]

MABEL CHILTERN

[Takes up roses and begins to arrange them in a bowl on the table.] People who don't keep their appointments in the Park are horrid.

LORD GORING

Detestable.

MABEL CHILTERN

I am glad you admit it. But I wish you wouldn't look so pleased about it.

LORD GORING

I can't help it. I always look pleased when I am with you.

MABEL CHILTERN

[Sadly.] Then I suppose it is my duty to remain with you?

LORD GORING

Of course it is.

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

MABEL CHILTERN

ACT IV.

Well, my duty is a thing I never do, on principle. It always depresses me. So I am afraid I must leave you.

LORD GORING

Please don't, Miss Mabel. I have something very particular to say to you.

MABEL CHILTERN

[*Rapturously.*] Oh ! is it a proposal ?

LORD GORING

[*Somewhat taken aback.*] Well, yes, it is—I am bound to say it is.

MABEL CHILTERN

[*With a sigh of pleasure.*] I am so glad. That makes the second to-day.

LORD GORING

[*Indignantly.*] The second to-day ? What conceited ass has been impertinent enough to dare to propose to you before I had proposed to you ?

MABEL CHILTERN

Tommy Trafford, of course. It is one of Tommy's days for proposing. He always

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT IV. proposes on Tuesdays and Thursdays, during the Season.

LORD GORING

You didn't accept him, I hope?

MABEL CHILTERN

I make it a rule never to accept Tommy. That is why he goes on proposing. Of course, as you didn't turn up this morning, I very nearly said yes. It would have been an excellent lesson both for him and for you if I had. It would have taught you both better manners.

LORD GORING

Oh! bother Tommy Trafford. Tommy is a silly little ass. I love you.

MABEL CHILTERN

I know. And I think you might have mentioned it before. I am sure I have given you heaps of opportunities.

LORD GORING

Mabel, do be serious. Please be serious.

MABEL CHILTERN

Ah! that is the sort of thing a man always

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

says to a girl before he has been married to ACT IV.
her. He never says it afterwards.

LORD GORING

[*Taking hold of her hand.*] Mabel, I have told you that I love you. Can't you love me a little in return ?

MABEL CHILTERN

You silly Arthur ! If you knew anything about . . . anything, which you don't, you would know that I adore you. Every one in London knows it except you. It is a public scandal the way I adore you. I have been going about for the last six months telling the whole of society that I adore you. I wonder you consent to have anything to say to me. I have no character left at all. At least, I feel so happy that I am quite sure I have no character left at all.

LORD GORING

[*Catches her in his arms and kisses her.* Then there is a pause of bliss.] Dear ! Do you know I was awfully afraid of being refused !

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT IV. MABEL CHILTERN

[*Looking up at him.*] But you never have been refused yet by anybody, have you, Arthur? I can't imagine any one refusing you.

LORD GORING

[*After kissing her again.*] Of course I'm not nearly good enough for you, Mabel.

MABEL CHILTERN

[*Nestling close to him.*] I am so glad, darling. I was afraid you were.

LORD GORING

[*After some hesitation.*] And I'm . . . I'm a little over thirty.

MABEL CHILTERN

Dear, you look weeks younger than that.

LORD GORING

[*Enthusiastically.*] How sweet of you to say so! . . . And it is only fair to tell you frankly that I am fearfully extravagant.

MABEL CHILTERN

But so am I, Arthur. So we're sure to

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

agree. And now I must go and see Ger- ACT IV.
trude.

LORD GORING

Must you really ? [Kisses her.]

MABEL CHILTERN

Yes.

LORD GORING

Then do tell her I want to talk to her particularly. I have been waiting here all the morning to see either her or Robert.

MABEL CHILTERN

Do you mean to say you didn't come here expressly to propose to me ?

LORD GORING

[Triumphant.] No ; that was a flash of genius.

MABEL CHILTERN

Your first.

LORD GORING

[With determination.] My last.

MABEL CHILTERN

I am delighted to hear it. Now don't stir.

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT IV. I'll be back in five minutes. And don't fall into any temptations while I am away.

LORD GORING

Dear Mabel, while you are away, there are none. It makes me horribly dependent on you.

[*Enter LADY CHILTERN.*]

LADY CHILTERN

Good morning, dear! How pretty you are looking!

MABEL CHILTERN

How pale you are looking, Gertrude! It is most becoming!

LADY CHILTERN

Good morning, Lord Goring!

LORD GORING

[*Bowing.*] Good morning, Lady Chiltern!

MABEL CHILTERN

[*Aside to LORD GORING.*] I shall be in the conservatory, under the second palm tree on the left.

LORD GORING

Second on the left?

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

MABEL CHILTERN

ACT IV.

[With a look of mock surprise.] Yes; the usual palm tree.

[Blows a kiss to him, unobserved by LADY CHILTERN, and goes out.]

LORD GORING

Lady Chiltern, I have a certain amount of very good news to tell you. Mrs. Cheveley gave me up Robert's letter last night, and I burned it. Robert is safe.

LADY CHILTERN

[Sinking on the sofa.] Safe! Oh! I am so glad of that. What a good friend you are to him—to us!

LORD GORING

There is only one person now that could be said to be in any danger.

LADY CHILTERN

Who is that?

LORD GORING

[Sitting down beside her.] Yourself.

LADY CHILTERN

I! In danger? What do you mean?

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT IV. LORD GORING

Danger is too great a word. It is a word I should not have used. But I admit I have something to tell you that may distress you, that terribly distresses me. Yesterday evening you wrote me a very beautiful, womanly letter, asking me for my help. You wrote to me as one of your oldest friends, one of your husband's oldest friends. Mrs. Cheveley stole that letter from my rooms.

LADY CHILTERN

Well, what use is it to her? Why should she not have it?

LORD GORING

[*Rising.*] Lady Chiltern, I will be quite frank with you. Mrs. Cheveley puts a certain construction on that letter and proposes to send it to your husband.

LADY CHILTERN

But what construction could she put on it? . . . Oh! not that! not that! If I in—in trouble, and wanting your help, trusting you, propose to come to you . . . that you may advise me . . . assist me . . . Oh! are there

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

women so horrible as that . . . ? And she ACT IV. proposes to send it to my husband ? Tell me what happened. Tell me all that happened.

LORD GORING

Mrs. Cheveley was concealed in a room adjoining my library, without my knowledge. I thought that the person who was waiting in that room to see me was yourself. Robert came in unexpectedly. A chair or something fell in the room. He forced his way in, and he discovered her. We had a terrible scene. I still thought it was you. He left me in anger. At the end of everything Mrs. Cheveley got possession of your letter—she stole it, when or how, I don't know.

LADY CHILTERN

At what hour did this happen ?

LORD GORING

At half-past ten. And now I propose that we tell Robert the whole thing at once.

LADY CHILTERN

[*Looking at him with amazement that is almost terror.*] You want me to tell Robert that the woman you expected was not Mrs.

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT IV. Cheveley, but myself? That it was I whom you thought was concealed in a room in your house, at half-past ten o'clock at night? You want me to tell him that?

LORD GORING

I think it is better that he should know the exact truth.

LADY CHILTERN

[*Rising.*] Oh, I couldn't, I couldn't!

LORD GORING

May I do it?

LADY CHILTERN

No.

LORD GORING

[*Gravely.*] You are wrong, Lady Chiltern.

LADY CHILTERN

No. The letter must be intercepted. That is all. But how can I do it? Letters arrive for him every moment of the day. His secretaries open them and hand them to him. I dare not ask the servants to bring me his letters. It would be impossible. Oh! why don't you tell me what to do?

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

LORD GORING

ACT IV.

Pray be calm, Lady Chiltern, and answer the questions I am going to put to you. You said his secretaries open his letters.

LADY CHILTERN

Yes.

LORD GORING

Who is with him to-day? Mr. Trafford, isn't it?

LADY CHILTERN

No. Mr. Montford, I think.

LORD GORING

You can trust him?

LADY CHILTERN

[With a gesture of despair.] Oh! how do I know?

LORD GORING

He would do what you asked him, wouldn't he?

LADY CHILTERN

I think so.

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT IV. LORD GORING

Your letter was on pink paper. He could recognise it without reading it, couldn't he ?
By the colour ?

LADY CHILTERN

I suppose so.

LORD GORING

Is he in the house now ?

LADY CHILTERN

Yes.

LORD GORING

Then I will go and see him myself, and tell him that a certain letter, written on pink paper, is to be forwarded to Robert to-day, and that at all costs it must not reach him.
[Goes to the door, and opens it.] Oh ! Robert is coming upstairs with the letter in his hand. It has reached him already.

LADY CHILTERN

[With a cry of pain.] Oh ! you have saved his life ; what have you done with mine ?

[Enter SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. He has the letter in his hand, and is reading it. He comes

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

*towards his wife, not noticing LORD GORING'S ACT IV.
presence.]*

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

‘I want you. I trust you. I am coming to you. Gertrude.’ Oh, my love! Is this true? Do you indeed trust me, and want me? If so, it was for me to come to you, not for you to write of coming to me. This letter of yours, Gertrude, makes me feel that nothing that the world may do can hurt me now. You want me, Gertrude?

[LORD GORING, *unseen by SIR ROBERT CHILTERN, makes an imploring sign to LADY CHILTERN to accept the situation and SIR ROBERT's error.*]

LADY CHILTERN

Yes.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

You trust me, Gertrude?

LADY CHILTERN

Yes.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Ah! why did you not add you loved me?

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT IV. LADY CHILTERN

[*Taking his hand.*] Because I loved you.

[*LORD GORING passes into the conservatory.*]

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Kisses her.*] Gertrude, you don't know what I feel. When Montford passed me your letter across the table—he had opened it by mistake, I suppose, without looking at the handwriting on the envelope—and I read it—oh! I did not care what disgrace or punishment was in store for me, I only thought you loved me still.

LADY CHILTERN

There is no disgrace in store for you, nor any public shame. Mrs. Cheveley has handed over to Lord Goring the document that was in her possession, and he has destroyed it.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Are you sure of this, Gertrude?

LADY CHILTERN

Yes; Lord Goring has just told me.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Then I am safe! Oh! what a wonderful thing to be safe! For two days I have been

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

in terror. I am safe now. How did Arthur ACT IV, destroy my letter? Tell me.

LADY CHILTERN

He burned it.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

I wish I had seen that one sin of my youth burning to ashes. How many men there are in modern life who would like to see their past burning to white ashes before them! Is Arthur still here?

LADY CHILTERN

Yes; he is in the conservatory.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

I am so glad now I made that speech last night in the House, so glad. I made it thinking that public disgrace might be the result. But it has not been so.

LADY CHILTERN

Public honour has been the result.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

I think so. I fear so, almost. For although I am safe from detection, although every proof against me is destroyed, I suppose,

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT IV. Gertrude . . . I suppose I should retire from public life? [He looks anxiously at his wife.]

LADY CHILTERN

[Eagerly.] Oh yes, Robert, you should do that. It is your duty to do that.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

It is much to surrender.

LADY CHILTERN

No; it will be much to gain.

[SIR ROBERT CHILTERN walks *up and down* the room with a troubled expression. Then comes over to his wife, and puts his hand on her shoulder.]

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

And you would be happy living somewhere alone with me, abroad perhaps, or in the country away from London, away from public life? You would have no regrets?

LADY CHILTERN

Oh! none, Robert.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[Sadly.] And your ambition for me? You used to be ambitious for me.

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

LADY CHILTERN

ACT IV

Oh, my ambition! I have none now, but that we two may love each other. It was your ambition that led you astray. Let us not talk about ambition.

[LORD GORING returns from the conservatory, looking very pleased with himself, and with an entirely new buttonhole that some one has made for him.]

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[Going towards him.] Arthur, I have to thank you for what you have done for me. I don't know how I can repay you. [Shakes hands with him.]

LORD GORING

My dear fellow, I'll tell you at once. At the present moment, under the usual palm tree . . . I mean in the conservatory . . .

[Enter MASON.]

MASON

Lord Caversham.

LORD GORING

That admirable father of mine really makes a habit of turning up at the wrong moment.

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT IV. It is very heartless of him, very heartless indeed.

[Enter LORD CAVERSHAM. MASON goes out.]

LORD CAVERSHAM

Good morning, Lady Chiltern! Warmest congratulations to you, Chiltern, on your brilliant speech last night. I have just left the Prime Minister, and you are to have the vacant seat in the Cabinet.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[With a look of joy and triumph.] A seat in the Cabinet?

LORD CAVERSHAM

Yes; here is the Prime Minister's letter.
[Hands letter.]

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[Takes letter and reads it.] A seat in the Cabinet!

LORD CAVERSHAM

Certainly, and you well deserve it too. You have got what we want so much in political life nowadays—high character, high moral tone, high principles. [To LORD

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

GORING.] Everything that you have not got, ACT IV.
sir, and never will have.

LORD GORING

I don't like principles, father. I prefer
prejudices.

[SIR ROBERT CHILTERN *is on the brink of accepting the Prime Minister's offer, when he sees his wife looking at him with her clear, candid eyes. He then realises that it is impossible.*]

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

I cannot accept this offer, Lord Caversham.
I have made up my mind to decline it.

LORD CAVERSHAM

Decline it, sir!

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

My intention is to retire at once from
public life.

LORD CAVERSHAM

[*Angrily.*] Decline a seat in the Cabinet,
and retire from public life? Never heard
such damned nonsense in the whole course of
my existence. I beg your pardon, Lady

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT IV. Chiltern. Chiltern, I beg your pardon. [To
LORD GORING.] Don't grin like that, sir.

LORD GORING
No, father.

LORD CAVERSHAM

Lady Chiltern, you are a sensible woman, the most sensible woman in London, the most sensible woman I know. Will you kindly prevent your husband from making such a . . . from talking such . . . Will you kindly do that, Lady Chiltern ?

LADY CHILTERN

I think my husband is right in his determination, Lord Caversham. I approve of it.

LORD CAVERSHAM

You approve of it ? Good Heavens !

LADY CHILTERN

[Taking her husband's hand.] I admire him for it. I admire him immensely for it. I have never admired him so much before. He is finer than even I thought him. [To SIR ROBERT CHILTERN.] You will go and write

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

your letter to the Prime Minister now, won't ACT IV.
you? Don't hesitate about it, Robert.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*With a touch of bitterness.*] I suppose I had better write it at once. Such offers are not repeated. I will ask you to excuse me for a moment, Lord Caversham.

LADY CHILTERN

I may come with you, Robert, may I not?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Yes, Gertrude.

[LADY CHILTERN *goes out with him.*]

LORD CAVERSHAM

What is the matter with this family? Something wrong here, eh? [Tapping his forehead.] Idiocy? Hereditary, I suppose. Both of them, too. Wife as well as husband. Very sad. Very sad indeed! And they are not an old family. Can't understand it.

LORD GORING

It is not idiocy, father, I assure you.

LORD CAVERSHAM

What is it then, sir?

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT IV. LORD GORING

[*After some hesitation.*] Well, it is what is called nowadays a high moral tone, father. That is all.

LORD CAVERSHAM

Hate these new-fangled names. Same thing as we used to call idiocy fifty years ago. Shan't stay in this house any longer.

LORD GORING

[*Taking his arm.*] Oh! just go in here for a moment, father. Third palm tree to the left, the usual palm tree.

LORD CAVERSHAM

What, sir?

LORD GORING

I beg your pardon, father, I forgot. The conservatory, father, the conservatory—there is some one there I want you to talk to.

LORD CAVERSHAM

What about, sir?

LORD GORING

About me, father.

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

LORD CAVERSHAM

ACT IV.

[*Grimly.*] Not a subject on which much eloquence is possible.

LORD GORING

No, father; but the lady is like me. She doesn't care much for eloquence in others. She thinks it a little loud.

[*LORD CAVERSHAM goes into the conservatory.*
LADY CHILTERN enters.]

LORD GORING

Lady Chiltern, why are you playing Mrs. Cheveley's cards?

LADY CHILTERN

[*Startled.*] I don't understand you.

LORD GORING

Mrs. Cheveley made an attempt to ruin your husband. Either to drive him from public life, or to make him adopt a dishonourable position. From the latter tragedy you saved him. The former you are now thrusting on him. Why should you do him the wrong Mrs. Cheveley tried to do and failed?

LADY CHILTERN

Lord Goring?

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT IV. LORD GORING

[Pulling himself together for a great effort, and showing the philosopher that underlies the dandy.] Lady Chiltern, allow me. You wrote me a letter last night in which you said you trusted me and wanted my help. Now is the moment when you really want my help, now is the time when you have got to trust me, to trust in my counsel and judgment. You love Robert. Do you want to kill his love for you? What sort of existence will he have if you rob him of the fruits of his ambition, if you take him from the splendour of a great political career, if you close the doors of public life against him, if you condemn him to sterile failure, he who was made for triumph and success? Women are not meant to judge us, but to forgive us when we need forgiveness. Pardon, not punishment, is their mission. Why should you scourge him with rods for a sin done in his youth, before he knew you, before he knew himself? A man's life is of more value than a woman's. It has larger issues, wider scope, greater ambitions. A woman's life revolves in curves of emotions. It is upon lines of intellect that a man's life

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

progresses. Don't make any terrible mistake, ACT IV.
Lady Chiltern. A woman who can keep a man's love, and love him in return, has done all the world wants of women, or should want of them.

LADY CHILTERN

[*Troubled and hesitating.*] But it is my husband himself who wishes to retire from public life. He feels it is his duty. It was he who first said so.

LORD GORING

Rather than lose your love, Robert would do anything, wreck his whole career, as he is on the brink of doing now. He is making for you a terrible sacrifice. Take my advice, Lady Chiltern, and do not accept a sacrifice so great. If you do, you will live to repent it bitterly. We men and women are not made to accept such sacrifices from each other. We are not worthy of them. Besides, Robert has been punished enough.

LADY CHILTERN

We have both been punished. I set him up too high.

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT IV. LORD GORING

[*With deep feeling in his voice.*] Do not for that reason set him down now too low. If he has fallen from his altar, do not thrust him into the mire. Failure to Robert would be the very mire of shame. Power is his passion. He would lose everything, even his power to feel love. Your husband's life is at this moment in your hands, your husband's love is in your hands. Don't mar both for him.

[*Enter SIR ROBERT CHILTERN.*]

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Gertrude, here is the draft of my letter. Shall I read it to you?

LADY CHILTERN

Let me see it.

[*SIR ROBERT hands her the letter. She reads it, and then, with a gesture of passion, tears it up.*]

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

What are you doing?

LADY CHILTERN

A man's life is of more value than a woman's. It has larger issues, wider scope, greater ambitions. Our lives revolve in

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curves of emotions. It is upon lines of ACT IV. intellect that a man's life progresses. I have just learnt this, and much else with it, from Lord Goring. And I will not spoil your life for you, nor see you spoil it as a sacrifice to me, a useless sacrifice !

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Gertrude ! Gertrude !

LADY CHILTERN

You can forget. Men easily forget. And I forgive. That is how women help the world. I see that now.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[Deeply overcome by emotion, embraces her.]
My wife ! my wife ! [To LORD GORING.]
Arthur, it seems that I am always to be in your debt.

LORD GORING

Oh dear no, Robert. Your debt is to Lady Chiltern, not to me !

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

I owe you much. And now tell me what you were going to ask me just now as Lord Caversham came in.

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ACT IV. LORD GORING

Robert, you are your sister's guardian, and I want your consent to my marriage with her. That is all.

LADY CHILTERN

Oh, I am so glad! I am so glad! [Shakes hands with LORD GORING.]

LORD GORING

Thank you, Lady Chiltern.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[With a troubled look.] My sister to be your wife?

LORD GORING

Yes.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[Speaking with great firmness.] Arthur, I am very sorry, but the thing is quite out of the question. I have to think of Mabel's future happiness. And I don't think her happiness would be safe in your hands. And I cannot have her sacrificed!

LORD GORING

Sacrificed!

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SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

ACT IV.

Yes, utterly sacrificed. Loveless marriages are horrible. But there is one thing worse than an absolutely loveless marriage. A marriage in which there is love, but on one side only; faith, but on one side only; devotion, but on one side only, and in which of the two hearts one is sure to be broken.

LORD GORING

But I love Mabel. No other woman has any place in my life.

LADY CHILTERN

Robert, if they love each other, why should they not be married?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Arthur cannot bring Mabel the love that she deserves.

LORD GORING

What reason have you for saying that?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*After a pause.*] Do you really require me to tell you?

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ACT IV. LORD GORING

Certainly I do.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

As you choose. When I called on you yesterday evening I found Mrs. Cheveley concealed in your rooms. It was between ten and eleven o'clock at night. I do not wish to say anything more. Your relations with Mrs. Cheveley have, as I said to you last night, nothing whatsoever to do with me. I know you were engaged to be married to her once. The fascination she exercised over you then seems to have returned. You spoke to me last night of her as of a woman pure and stainless, a woman whom you respected and honoured. That may be so. But I cannot give my sister's life into your hands. It would be wrong of me. It would be unjust, infamously unjust to her.

LORD GORING

I have nothing more to say.

LADY CHILTERN

Robert, it was not Mrs. Cheveley whom Lord Goring expected last night.

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SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

ACT IV.

Not Mrs. Cheveley! Who was it then?

LORD GORING

Lady Chiltern!

LADY CHILTERN

It was your own wife. Robert, yesterday afternoon Lord Goring told me that if ever I was in trouble I could come to him for help, as he was our oldest and best friend. Later on, after that terrible scene in this room, I wrote to him telling him that I trusted him, that I had need of him, that I was coming to him for help and advice. [SIR ROBERT CHILTERN takes the letter out of his pocket.] Yes, that letter. I didn't go to Lord Goring's, after all. I felt that it is from ourselves alone that help can come. Pride made me think that. Mrs. Cheveley went. She stole my letter and sent it anonymously to you this morning, that you should think . . . Oh! Robert, I cannot tell you what she wished you to think. . . .

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

What! Had I fallen so low in your eyes

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT IV. that you thought that even for a moment I could have doubted your goodness? Gertrude, Gertrude, you are to me the white image of all good things, and sin can never touch you. Arthur, you can go to Mabel, and you have my best wishes! Oh! stop a moment. There is no name at the beginning of this letter. The brilliant Mrs. Cheveley does not seem to have noticed that. There should be a name.

LADY CHILTERN

Let me write yours. It is you I trust and need. You and none else.

LORD GORING

Well, really, Lady Chiltern, I think I should have back my own letter.

LADY CHILTERN

[Smiling.] No; you shall have Mabel.
[Takes the letter and writes her husband's name on it.]

LORD GORING

Well, I hope she hasn't changed her mind. It's nearly twenty minutes since I saw her last.

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[Enter MABEL CHILTERN and LORD CAVERS- ACT IV.
HAM.]

MABEL CHILTERN

Lord Goring, I think your father's conversation much more improving than yours. I am only going to talk to Lord Caversham in the future, and always under the usual palm tree.

LORD GORING

Darling! [Kisses her.]

LORD CAVERSHAM

[Considerably taken aback.] What does this mean, sir? You don't mean to say that this charming, clever young lady has been so foolish as to accept you?

LORD GORING

Certainly, father! And Chiltern's been wise enough to accept the seat in the Cabinet.

LORD CAVERSHAM

I am very glad to hear that, Chiltern . . . I congratulate you, sir. If the country doesn't go to the dogs or the Radicals, we shall have you Prime Minister, some day.

[Enter MASON.]

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

ACT IV. MASON

Luncheon is on the table, my Lady!

[MASON *goes out.*]

MABEL CHILTERN

You'll stop to luncheon, Lord Caversham, won't you?

LORD CAVERSHAM

With pleasure, and I'll drive you down to Downing Street afterwards, Chiltern. You have a great future before you, a great future. Wish I could say the same for you, sir. [To LORD GORING.] But your career will have to be entirely domestic.

LORD GORING

Yes, father, I prefer it domestic.

LORD CAVERSHAM

And if you don't make this young lady an ideal husband, I'll cut you off with a shilling.

MABEL CHILTERN

An ideal husband! Oh, I don't think I should like that. It sounds like something in the next world.

LORD CAVERSHAM

What do you want him to be then, dear?

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MABEL CHILTERN

ACT IV.

He can be what he chooses. All I want is to be . . . to be . . . oh! a real wife to him.

LORD CAVERSHAM

Upon my word, there is a good deal of common sense in that, Lady Chiltern.

[They all go out except SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. He sinks into a chair, wrapt in thought. After a little time LADY CHILTERN returns to look for him.]

LADY CHILTERN

[Leaning over the back of the chair.] Aren't you coming in, Robert?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[Taking her hand.] Gertrude, is it love you feel for me, or is it pity merely?

LADY CHILTERN

[Kisses him.] It is love, Robert. Love, and only love. For both of us a new life is beginning.

CURTAIN

